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INDIA TODAY

OCTOBER 25, 2021 ₹75

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INDIA TODAY CONCLAVE 2021

A BETTER NORMAL

LEADING FIGURES FROM POLITICS, BUSINESS, SCIENCE AND SPORTS OFFER FRESH INSIGHTS INTO THE PERILS AND PROMISE OF A POST-PANDEMIC WORLD

RNI NO. 28587/75 REGISTERED NO. DL(ND)-11/6068/2021-22-2023; LICENSED TO POST WPP NO. U(C)-88/2021-23; FARIDABAD/05/2020-22

Published on every Friday of Advance Week; Posted at LPC Delhi — RMS — Delhi — 110006 on Every Friday & Saturday; Total number of Pages 76 (including cover pages)

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FROM THE

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Five months from now, we will mark the second anniversary of the single most defining event of our time—the coronavirus pandemic. In the 19 months since the WHO declared the Covid-19 outbreak a global pandemic, the virus has killed nearly 5 million persons worldwide and caused a loss of about 4 trillion dollars in economic output. It is the most significant global disruptor since the Second World War, and we are not out of it yet.

INDIA TODAY
BRIDGING THE DIVIDE

March 27, 2006

INDIA TODAY
THE BIG CHURN

March 26, 2018

INDIA TODAY
AGENDA 2019

March 18, 2019

There is much to worry about and, yet, much to be hopeful about. The triumph of the human spirit can be seen in the rapid pace with which we developed multiple vaccines to fight the virus and the speed with which we administered them.

The India Today Conclave 2020 was to have been held on March 13 and 14 last year, just two days after the WHO's global pandemic alarm. We had to cancel it. Since then, we have seen the pandemic throwing the world economy into turmoil and disrupting global supply chains. India has seen the largest contraction of its economy in four decades. The geopolitical shift caused by the rise of an aggressive China has added to existing challenges like climate change.

The unprecedented quadrilateral convergence has caused a state of precariousness. A return to the normalcy of pre-pandemic life seems unlikely. What we could be looking at instead is what we chose as our conclave theme this year—'A Better Normal'. We decided to look ahead rather than linger in retrospection. We had a galaxy of 78 speakers—the largest number we have had so far—telling us what this Better Normal could look like and describing the most significant challenges on the road ahead.

For one, the commerce and industry minister Piyush Goyal pointed to the $197 billion in exports and the boom in the services sector to declare that an economic recovery is around the corner. With the Sensex breaching the 60,000 mark recently, ace investor Rakesh Jhunjhunwala says he's bullish on the India growth story.

One of our biggest security-diplomatic challenges is the massive military mobilisation by the People's Liberation Army (PLA) of China on the fringes of eastern Ladakh over the past 17 months. As foreign minister S. Jaishankar told us, relations with Beijing can be normalised only if the PLA withdraws its troops: "They (China) need to stick with the (peace and tranquility) agreements and do the right things."

Our panel of young climate change experts told us that climate change must be prioritised on a national and global scale right away. Because the longer we wait, the more irreversible the damage will be. This could be equally true of our response to the pandemic and the reprioritisation of public health. It's not going to be an easy ask—for, as Bill Gates, co-chair of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, told us, for climate change, there is no quick solution like inventing a vaccine. The cost of going green or reducing carbon emissions to zero is simply unacceptable even for the rich countries, not to mention middle-income countries like India. The road transport and highways minister Nitin Gadkari told us that one of India's biggest problems right now is pollution, for which internal combustion engines need to be replaced by e-vehicles. We looked at new trends like drones, unicorns and cryptocurrencies, our new OTT stars and the makers of some of the most riveting online shows. Our only two individual Olympic gold medalists—Abhinav Bindra and Neeraj Chopra—described their contrasting approaches to competition.

In short, what we make of this brave new world as we strive for a Better Normal is predicated on our human capital. As Sir Malcolm Grant, founding chair of the National Health Service, England, told us: "It's not about hospitals, it's not about equipment, it's not even about money, it's about people and it's the dedication of healthcare professionals that makes the huge difference between effective health systems and ineffective health systems." Sir Grant was speaking about the response to the pandemic, but this could be equally true of almost any of the challenges facing us in the years ahead.

(Aroon Purie)

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Volume XLVI Number 43; For the week October 19-25, 2021, published on every Friday

- Editorial/Corporate Office Living Media India Ltd., India Today Group Mediaplex, FC-8, Sector-16A, Film City, Noida - 201301; Phone: 0120-4807100
- Subscriptions: For assistance contact Customer Care India Today Group, C-9, Sector-10, Noida (UP)-201301; Phones: Toll-free number: 1800 1800 100 (from BSNL/MTNL lines); (95120) 2479900 from Delhi and Faridabad; (0120) 2479900 from Rest of India (Monday-Friday, 10 a.m.-6 p.m.); Fax: (0120) 4078080; Mumbai: 022-66063411/3412, Kolkata: 033-40525327, Chennai: 044-24303200; e-mail: *wecare@intoday.com*
- Sales: Direct all trade enquiries to General Manager (Sales), Living Media India Limited, C-9, Sector-10, Noida-201301 (UP)
- Regd. Office: F-26, First Floor, Connaught Place, New Delhi-110001.
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Printed and published by Manoj Sharma on behalf of Living Media India Limited. Printed at Thomson Press India Limited,
18-35 Milestone, Delhi Mathura Road, Faridabad-121007, (Haryana).
Published at F-26, First Floor, Connaught Place, New Delhi-110001.
Editor: Raj Chengappa.

- India Today does not take the responsibility for returning unsolicited publication material.

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SYNDICATIONS TODAY INDIA DELIVERED
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INDIA TODAY

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A BETTER NORMAL

From climate change to the pandemic, from the economy to a geopolitical power shift... The 19th India Today Conclave made sense of the four big drifts of this decade

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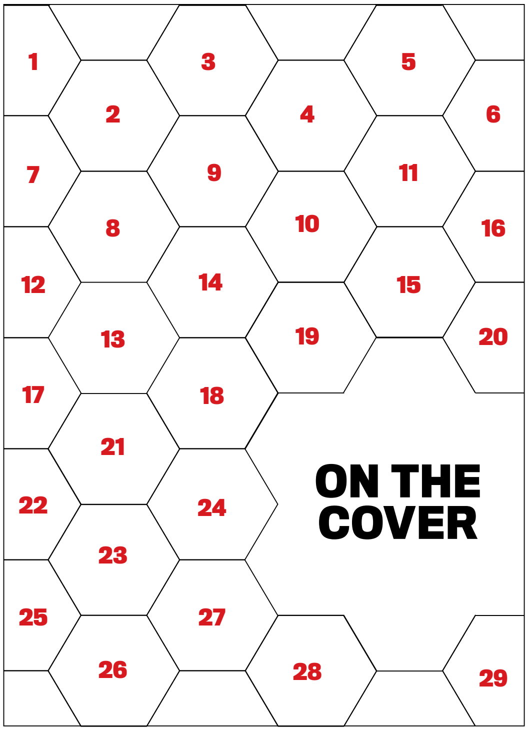

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UPFRONT

SAJAD HAMEED/RIAU/ GETTY IMAGES

GRIEF MARCH Sikh protesters in Srinagar carry the body of schoolteacher Supinder Kaur who was killed by militants on Oct. 8

J&K

FEAR RETURNS TO THE VALLEY

By Moazum Mohammad in Srinagar

For the past fortnight, a Kashmiri Pandit social activist in Srinagar (name withheld for security concerns) has been living under police protection. A posse of policemen knocked on his door around midnight on October 5 and shifted him to a more secure location, a kilometre from his house. “They told me I was on the militants’ radar and needed to go with them,” he says.

Only a few hours earlier, militants had killed Makhan Lal Bindroo, a 68-year-old Kashmiri Pandit who owned a pharmacy in the Iqbal Park area of Srinagar. Bindroo, like the social activist, was among the 808 Kashmiri Pandit families that chose to stay behind when militancy in the 1990s forced a mass exodus of Hindus from the Valley.

Fear and déjà vu returned to the Valley this month as militants killed seven people—among them three Hindus and one Sikh woman—in a spate of targeted killings. The most gruesome one took place on October 7, when militants singled out two Hindu teachers— Supinder Kaur of Beerwah village in Budgam and Deepak Chand of Jammu—after checking everyone’s ID cards, and shot them inside the government boys’ higher secondary school in Srinagar’s Sangam area. “It was akin to the Doda and Rajouri massacres where people from a particular community were singled out and killed,” says Sanjay Tickoo, who heads the Kashmiri Pandit

Sangharsh Samiti (KPSS), an organisation fighting for the rights of Kashmiri Pandits, and is among those who stayed behind despite the militancy.

According to data shared on the floor of the J&K assembly in 2010, the count of Kashmiri Pandits killed since the '90s was 219; the KPSS puts the latest count at 677. More than 62,000 families, mainly Kashmiri Pandits, abandoned their homes, according to data from the home ministry. Some 40,000 of them now live in Jammu, 20,000 in Delhi and the remaining elsewhere in India.

The killing of the schoolteachers has struck fear among Hindus and Sikhs in the Valley. Seven families have temporarily left Kashmir and more than 1,400 employed under the Prime Minister's Development Package (PMDP) for J&K have shifted to Jammu, according to Tickoo. The killings have, in fact, been a massive setback for the government's outreach since it abrogated Article 370 and bifurcated the state into Union territories on August 5, 2019. The PMDP, which was announced by the Manmohan Singh-led UPA government in 2008 to provide employment and accommodation to facilitate the return and rehabilitation of Kashmiri migrants, was taken forward by the Modi government in 2015, announcing more jobs and housing.

At the Valley's biggest transit camp, a secured cluster in Vessu in Qazigund in south Kashmir along the Srinagar-Jammu national highway, 350 of the 400-odd Kashmiri Pandit families have left for Jammu, according to Sunny Raina, president of the Vessu welfare committee and a junior engineer in the roads and buildings department. "The remaining families will also shift as the government has failed to provide security," he says.

A series of raids and detentions of suspects and a heightened security alert across the Valley have stemmed the bloody tide of militant attacks for the moment. Random frisking of commuters has intensified and the number of checkpoints on roads have multiplied manifold.

A VIOLENT DISPLACEMENT

808

No. of Kashmiri Pandit families that chose to stay behind during the exodus of Hindus from the Valley in the 1990s

219

No. of Kashmiri Pandits killed since the '90s, as per data shared in the House in 2010; the KPSS puts the latest count at 677

62,000

No. of families that have migrated from the Valley since the '90s

THE RECENT KILLINGS ARE RETALIATORY, AN ATTEMPT TO CONVEY THAT MILITANCY THRIVES IN THE VALLEY DESPITE RECENT SETBACKS

Security forces have gunned down seven militants so far since October 8, while five soldiers, including a junior commissioned officer, were killed fighting militants in the Pirpanjal region. Among the militants eliminated are two from The Resistance Front (TRF), who the police say were responsible for the killing of a civilian in the Shahgund area of Bandipora and a *pani-puri* vendor from Bihar in Srinagar's Alamgari Bazar on October 5. The TRF, according to the police, is another avatar of the Lashkar-e-Taiba, and the recent killings were carried out by 'hybrid' militants. These part-timers escape the radar of security agencies because they live apparently normal lives, but are in fact highly radicalised. In the past 10 months, militants have killed 28 civilians, according to the Kashmir inspector general of police Vijay Kumar.

The attacks seem to have intensified in the wake of the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan on August 15. There have been minor violations of the ceasefire agreement along the Line of Control (LoC) as well as increased infiltration bids from across the border. About 50 foreign militants are believed to have infiltrated since July this year and are active in north Kashmir, close to the LoC. In September, seven militants were killed in Uri and one captured alive in multiple counter-insurgency operations along the LoC. "The (recent) attacks have come after the leadership of the militants was eliminated. They are intended to scare and convey the message that militancy is alive," says an official experienced in counterinsurgency.

Promising a "befitting reply", J&K Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha has said that the blood of innocent civilians will be avenged. "I assure you that we have given a free hand to security agencies to eliminate the enemies of humanity, and soon the terrorists and those aiding and abetting them will pay for their heinous crimes."

But many, like Kashmiri analyst Majid Hyderi, are not convinced by the government's assurances. They are not making enough effort to save the lives of those who have received threats, he says. "The police have registered multiple FIRs of threats to prominent Kashmiris, including politicians, journalists and social activists, but the J&K administration is busy holding music concerts and dance festivals," he says. It does little to assuage their fears. ■

UTTAR PRADESH/ CONGRESS

Can Priyanka revive the GOP?

By Ashish Misra

लड़ेंगे, जीतेंगे
बर्खास्त करो
मंत्री की बर्खास्तगी कब?
नों को न्याय दो
कांग्रेस कमेटी
मिश्रा
करो
न्याय
कमेटी

ANI

FIGHTBACK Priyanka Gandhi and state Congress chief Ajay Kumar Lallu at a 'silent protest' in Lucknow demanding the resignation of Union MoS for home Ajay Mishra, Oct. 11

On the night of October 3, Congress general secretary and Uttar Pradesh in-charge Priyanka Gandhi flew into Lucknow from Delhi. Her flight landed at 9 pm and she immediately left for Lakhimpur Kheri where, earlier in the day, violence had erupted in Tikunia town after four farmers were mowed down by a convoy of Ashish Mishra, son of Union minister of state for home Ajay Mishra 'Teni'.

The state government had sealed all the roads from Sitapur, which is on the route to Lakhimpur Kheri, and every vehicle coming through was being checked. Priyanka's convoy reached Sitapur at 11 pm, 100 km from Lucknow. Here, Priyanka asked Congress district president Utkarsh Awasthi, a local who knew every route from Sitapur to Lakhimpur Kheri, to take the wheel. After dodging the police for about four hours, Priyanka's convoy reached Hargaon, a town adjacent to Lakhimpur Kheri but could not break the cordon there.

Priyanka was taken into custody and placed under house arrest at a police guesthouse in Sitapur. By the next day, after she went on a hunger strike, the entire nation's focus was on Lakhimpur Kheri. Priyanka was adamant about meeting the families of the farmers killed in the Tikunia incident. The state government finally relented on the third day. After being in police custody for 57 hours, Priyanka, along with her brother and former Congress president Rahul Gandhi, who had also arrived by then, met the families of the murdered farmers late on October 6.

UP Congress spokesperson Sachin Rawat says, "The way Priyanka raised the Lakhimpur incident against the BJP government forced leaders of other parties out of their AC rooms." After meeting the families of the deceased farmers, Priyanka returned to Lucknow and threw herself into preparations for the Congress rally in Varanasi on October 10. She launched the party's Mission 2022 poll campaign that day with a 'Nyay rally' at the Jagatpur Inter College ground in the Rohaniya area of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's parliamentary constituency. "Prime Minister Modi can roam the world but he cannot make it to Lakhimpur. He can visit Lucknow for 'Azadi ka Amrit Mahotsav' but not Lakhimpur, a hundred-odd kilometres away, to acquaint himself with the pain of the farmers of this country," she declaimed at the rally.

After the Lakhimpur Kheri incident, a political debate has started in UP over Priyanka's activism in support of the farmers. S.K. Dwivedi, former HoD, department of political science, Lucknow University, explains: "Priyanka's campaign, with just months to go for the assembly election, will add to the troubles of the main opposition Samajwadi Party (SP) as it increases the risk of a division in the anti-BJP vote. There will be more pressure on the SP now to form a coalition.”

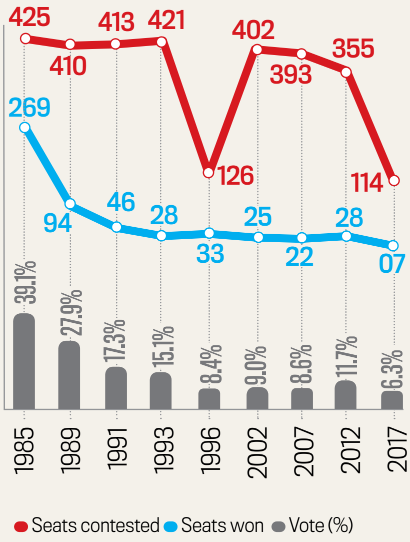
The UP Congress, which was the first to come out in support of the farmers in the immediate aftermath of the Lakhimpur incident, is now in a position to bargain for more seats in any anti-BJP alliance. In 2017, the Congress had contested 114 seats, in an alliance with the SP. However, after the election, president Akhilesh Yadav broke off the alliance saying the SP got zero benefit from it. On Priyanka and the Tikunia incident, Akhilesh says, “In every incident that happens in UP, it’s SP leaders who come forward first to help. This is a BJP strategy to prop up the Congress before the assembly poll.”

Election strategist Prashant Kishor offered his own reality check in a tweet on October 8: “People looking for a quick, spontaneous revival of a GOP (grand old party)-led opposition based on the Lakhimpur incident are setting themselves up for a big disappointment. Unfortunately, there are no quick-fix solutions to the deep-rooted problems and structural weaknesses of the GOP.”

The Congress scion, who took charge of eastern UP in January 2019, has had the responsibility of the state since the Lok Sabha election. The Congress was reduced to a single MP from UP in 2019, so the 2022 assembly election is crucial to Priyanka in many ways. It will be a test of her organisational ability and will decide how popular she is as a leader. “For the past three decades, the Congress organisation has been steadily deteriorating in UP,” says Dwivedi. “In the assembly too, the number of Congress MLAs is at its lowest level (seven seats). If Priyanka is able to get the Congress a respectable number of seats in the assembly election, she will establish herself as a leader.”

For the past two years, Priyanka has been trying to rebuild the state organisation. She reduced the lumbering 500-member state executive committee to a much leaner 115 members and appointed Ajay Kumar Lallu, who is from the backward class, as state president. Care was taken to ensure a caste balance in the formation of the state executive. So, there are 41 upper caste leaders, 20 Muslims, 40 OBCs, 14 Dalits and other castes. Dwivedi explains, “Priyanka gave special attention to those castes (Brahmins, Thakurs and Kurmis) who voted en masse for the BJP in 2017. It’s a good strategy to try and break into the BJP’s vote bank.”

HOW THE CONGRESS SHRANK IN UP



Note: Figures are from the Election Commission. After the bifurcation of the state in 2000, assembly seats in UP decreased from 425 to 403. In 1996, the Congress fought the elections with the BSP, and in 2017 with the SP

PRIYANKA’S ARREST AND THE CONGRESS’S EARLY REACTION TO THE LAKHIMPUR KHERI ATROCITY HAS PUT THE PARTY BACK ON THE MAP IN UP

The same strategy has been used in appointing the 75 district presidents, though Ajay Lallu has a different take: “Priyanka has selected the office-bearers and district presidents through a talent search based on feedback from all leaders. Only those with potential and talent have got positions,” he says. The other visible shift is in a preference for younger leaders as new district presidents.

The Congress state organisation has been divided into six zones—Agra, Meerut, Bareilly, Awadh, Purvanchal and Bundelkhand. After the rejig at the state and district levels, the party moved to the panchayat/ booth level. Ajay Lallu says, “Twenty-one member committees have been formed in all 59,000 gram panchayats. Young leaders have been given positions in a large number of them.” The process of selecting candidates for the assembly poll has also started. For this, applications were invited from leaders till October 12. The party has also shortlisted the names of 200 leaders who have won assembly and Lok Sabha seats in the past.

But the attempted organisational overhaul still does not address the party’s lack of popular, heavyweight leaders, or the erratic nature of its programmes. It says a lot about the ennui that has set in when Congress workers complain that little is being done to keep them continuously engaged in party affairs. Then there are the intra-party spats between the old guard and the newbies and the abysmal scores at the hustings, including the recent panchayat elections, where the Congress won just 200 of 3,050 zila panchayat seats.

If the organisational makeover and the speedy intervention at Lakhimpur give the party a fillip, there is some hope in another piece of statistic: while the party won only seven seats in 2017, it finished second in another 49. So, if Priyanka’s campaign lends the party some credibility in the run-up to the election, it may become a front-running beneficiary of anti-incumbency in the state. Meanwhile, as one enters the party state headquarters on Mall Avenue, Lucknow, a photo of Priyanka bears down from the edge of a large hoarding with a rising sun bursting through in the middle. How bright the Congress sun shines in the next assembly poll may come down to the personal charisma and star power of Priyanka Gandhi. ■

AP

READY TO GO Air India aircraft at the Indira Gandhi International Airport in New Delhi

AIR INDIA

THE RETURN JOURNEY

By M.G. Arun

The privatisation of Air India, though much delayed, should come as a big relief to the Modi government, which has faced much flak for its apparent inability to come good on its promise to get out of business and focus on governance. Even though the Tatas' bid of Rs 18,000 crore was not exactly a king's ransom—the government gets to keep only Rs 2,700 crore; the remaining Rs 15,300 crore is debt the Tatas have taken on—the Tatas' bid was nearly 40 per cent higher than the Centre's reserve price and nearly 20 per cent higher than the only other bid, by SpiceJet promoter Ajay Singh.

Air India is just one of a large number of public sector undertakings (PSUs) the government hopes to disinvest in this year. For 2021-22, the Centre has a disinvestment/ asset monetisation target of Rs 1.75 lakh crore. However, progress has been slow. The sale of firms such as Bharat Petroleum Corporation, Shipping Corporation of India and Container Corporation of India are yet to come through. The government has also proposed privatising two public sector banks and one general insurance company this year.

The Centre's record in this effort has been patchy. Between 2014-15 and 2020-21, the Modi government targeted raising Rs 6.57 lakh crore through disinvestments, but managed only about 60 per cent of that, or Rs 4.04 lakh crore. In 2020-21 alone, the government had hoped to raise Rs 2.1 lakh crore, but again did about 10 per cent (Rs 21,000 crore), despite the fact that the markets were buoyant for much of the latter part of the financial year.

For the Tata Group, the purchase of Air India—the formalities of which are expected to be completed by December—means the highly diversified conglomerate now operates three airlines. These include Vistara, which it operates with Singapore Airlines, and AirAsia India, a budget airline in which it holds a stake along with Malaysian carrier AirAsia.

Founded in 1930 by J.R.D. Tata, the chairman of Tata Sons from 1938 to 1988, Air India slipped out of the Tatas' grasp after it was nationalised in June 1953. J.R.D.'s business acumen in making the airline a favourite among fliers was matched only by his love of flying. In 1930, he became the first Indian to pilot a plane from India to England, and that, without most of the equipment modern aircraft carry as standard kit. He was also the first to launch a cargo flight between Karachi and Bombay under Tata Aviation Service in 1932; the commercial airline Tata Airlines was launched the following year. He had an audacious dream of putting India on the international aviation map, which materialised with the formation of Air India International on March 8, 1948, with its Bombay-London service being inaugurated on June 8 that year.

The Tata Group's winning bid for Air India comes at a time when most economies have opened up after a most debilitating pandemic, raising hopes of a revival of the airline business across the world. In India, the sector has suffered one of its toughest phases ever.

SIZING UP THE DEAL

AIR INDIA'S KEY ASSETS

Fleet: Over 130 aircraft
Landing/ Parking slots: 4,400 domestic and 1,800 international landing and parking slots at domestic airports; 900 slots at international airports

REAL ESTATE PORTFOLIO

- Air India has thousands of crores worth of real estate in several parts of the world
- It sold 115 units of real estate assets between 2015 and 2021, raising Rs 738 crore
- Rental income alone (from properties across India) totals about Rs 100 crore a year

CHALLENGES FOR THE TATAS

- Rs 15,300 crore of debt, taken on as part of the bid
- The Tata Group will need to retain all staff for a year
- Air India pilots have been clamouring for the restoration of full salaries
- The domestic industry's losses in 2020-21 are pegged at about Rs 22,400 crore

THE DEAL

The sale was based on Air India's enterprise value, which took total debt into consideration

₹18,000 crore

Total enterprise value of the deal

₹2,700 crore

What the Tata Group will pay the government; the balance Rs 15,300 crore is the debt it will take on

Indian airlines and airports registered losses of Rs 22,400 crore in 2020-21 as the lockdowns severely restricted travel and grounded fleets. The pandemic, coupled with high aviation fuel costs, bled all carriers. Air India, which had been reporting losses ever since its merger with Indian Airlines in 2007-08, had accumulated losses of Rs 70,820 crore as on March 31, 2020. Its debt stood at Rs 61,562 crore on August 31. Airlines in the Tata stable have not fared well either. AirAsia India's losses nearly doubled to Rs 1,533 crore on a year-on-year basis in 2020-21, while those of Vistara narrowed to Rs 1,612 crore in the same period, as per media reports.

The highly competitive Indian aviation market is vastly different from what it was in the 1950s, when Air India was nationalised. However, there are big opportunities too. Domestic air passenger traffic continued to grow in August, with passenger volume rising 31 per cent over the previous month to 6.6 million, according to credit rating agency ICRA. How the Tata Group rebuilds Air India, which lost substantial market share to private players like Indigo Airlines and the erstwhile Jet Airways in the past decade, will be keenly watched.

It may not be easy for Air India to make a quick turnaround, but the carrier has some advantages over other airlines, the most significant of them being its international operations, from which it earns over two-thirds of its revenue. It has a fleet of over 130 aircraft, and the Tata Group will now have control of Air India's 4,400 domestic and 1,800 international landing and parking slots at domestic airports, as well as 900 slots at airports overseas. It also has thousands of crores worth of real estate assets in several parts of the world. Regaining customer trust will be a mammoth task but is not an impossible goal.

Those who worked closely with J.R.D. Tata say he had the vision to realise two things: first, that air travel would become economical only if it became a mass market enterprise, and second, that Air India could become an effective player in the sector only if it could offer something unique to travellers. These will become crucial as the Tata Group tries to restore the airline back to its past glory. ■

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ANI

ODISHA

OPEN FOR BUSINESS

By Romita Datta

At a time when national economic statistics paint a grim picture of upended small businesses and massive unemployment, Orissa has shone a beacon of hope, lining up firm proposals for investment of over Rs 3 lakh crore. These investments by a hundred-odd companies will create an estimated 110,000 new jobs. State industry secretary Hemant Sharma claims these figures were released only after the Naveen Patnaik government was convinced that the projects would materialise and not remain unfulfilled expressions of intent. “Investments worth Rs 3 lakh crore have been approved by the government’s single window clearance system and are at various stages of execution like land allotment, construction etc.,” says Sharma, brushing aside any scepticism.

In 2020-21, when the pandemic was raging and businesses were either shutting shop or going slow across the country, industries in Odisha contributed to 36 per cent of the state GVA (gross value added), continuing the growth pattern from 2019-20 when the sector grew by 3.6 per cent compared to 0.9 per cent for the country, according to Odisha government figures.

The state is blessed with rich mineral reserves, including 28 per cent of the national reserves of iron ore, coal (24 per cent), bauxite (59 per cent) and chromite (98 per cent). It has seen big-ticket investments by a number of corporate giants such as Tata Steel, Jindal Steel, Bhushan Steel, Hindalco Industries and Arcelor Mittal Nippon Steel. It is also strategically placed—a 480 km coastline, three operational ports at Paradip, Dhamra and Gopalpur, which together handled 153.9 million metric tonnes of cargo in 2020-21, a network of good motorable roads and good railway connectivity. Both Paradip and Dhamra ports are being expanded to handle 300 MMT of cargo, three times their current capacity.

Two all-weather riverine ports are also coming up. While the Paradip Port Trust is setting up one on a PPP model with a Rs 4,000 crore investment, a Tata Steel-led consortium is setting up the Subarnarekha Port to serve the hinterland in eastern India—West Bengal, Jharkhand, Bihar and the Northeast.

> Odisha is pushing hard to develop non-traditional labour-intensive industries and making investments in retraining its youth for newer jobs

Odisha’s relative political stability—Patnaik’s Biju Janata Dal (BJD) has ruled the state since 2000—has provided a secure investment climate, possibly why the POSCO wound healed so quickly. The industrial misadventure with the South Korean steel major has left no scars in the minds of investors. So Arcelor Mittal, which had withdrawn from a project in 2013, is now setting up a 24 MTPA steel plant along with a captive jetty. The parcel of land where POSCO had planned its project will now see a 12 MTPA Jindal Steel factory.

“Odisha created a framework for business competitiveness over the last decade, largely due to the vision of chief minister Naveen *babu*,” says Nilanjan Ghosh, director, Observer Research Foundation. “Natural capital was abundant here, but other factors of business competitiveness have also improved, such as social capital and physical capital (infrastructure). The bureaucracy is by and large supportive of industry and a lower cost of living means the state has a competitive edge in terms of attracting and retaining human capital. All these combine to lower the cost of

ON THE BUTTON CM Naveen Patnaik inaugurates development works in Kotiya village, Koraput district, via video-conferencing

transacting business in Odisha. This is why even underdeveloped regions such as Kandhamal, where JSW Energy is setting up a Rs 6,000 crore pump storage project, are emerging as new centres of economic growth. As a result, insurgency too has come down substantially," says Ghosh.

TRADE SECRETS

Odisha has 100,000 acres of ready land available for industrial use. A dedicated land bank scheme with an inventory of investment-ready land has been uploaded to the industry department's 'Go Plus' portal—a GI (geographical indication)-based ready reckoner on infrastructure and location-specific industrial plots. The strict enforcement of the Land Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act as a concomitant of land acquisition and making public hearings mandatory has minimised public resentment and agitations.

Among the big-ticket commitments of financial year 2020-21 are Jindal Steel and Power (Rs 76,000 crore), Bhushan Steel (Rs 55,000 crore) and Tata Steel (Rs 47,000 crore). Some 60-70 companies have crossed the preliminary hurdle of getting approval from the 'Go-Swift' single window facilitation and tracking portal. Senior officers from all regulatory authorities are part of the portal that handholds investors and helps resolve any issues they might face. The facilitation resource has been around for the past five years, leading to speedier clearances and a far smoother investor experience, says Sharma. No more runarounds of multiple government departments for sundry NOCs (no-objection certificates), for example."Fifty-plus services under 18 departments are clubbed under a single portal and everything is available at the touch of a finger," says Sharma. "The deadline fixed for clearances is 25 days. The portal is also linked to the Odisha Rights to Public Service Act."

Interestingly, during the pandemic period, Odisha has seen a boom in diversified sectors including non-renewable energy, green energy equipment, auto and auto component parts, electronics manufacturing, telecom equipment, textiles, apparel, pharma and bulk drugs. The Odisha Industrial Development Plan, 2025 also contains a blueprint for sector-specific infrastructure development—by way of dedicated parks, readymade sheds, plug-and-play infrastructure and programmes to upscale the skills of local youth for re-employability.

A big reason why the Naveen Patnaik government wants to shift focus from conventional mineral- and metal-based industries is that they are capital-intensive while now becoming less labour-intensive. For instance, says industry secretary Sharma, steel majors now manage with far fewer employees even though their production has doubled or trebled. Tata Steel at Kalinganagar employed 15,000 people for a 6MT plant while JSW Steel now needs only 7,500 for a 12MT plant. "Compare that with the textiles and fashion industry: Aditya Birla Fashion Retail employs 5,000 for a moderate-sized investment of Rs 500 crore. Sectors like textile and food processing and pharma are labour-intensive," which serves the state's other objective of providing gainful employment to its people.

Recognising that Covid has not been kind to the 853,000 migrants from the state, the government has started a skill development institute in Bhubaneswar. Additionally, the Institute of Chemical Technology, in collaboration with Indian Oil Corporation, is creating a pool of skilled workers who have been guaranteed placement within the state. The two institutes are primarily focused on training the state's underprivileged youth for jobs in industry. The Odisha Skill Development Authority serves as the nodal agency, and armed with a budget of Rs 5,000 crore for the next five years, has set itself a target of upgrading the skills of at least 1.5 million local youth.

As envisaged by the state, the bulk of employment opportunities should come in its own backyard. CM Naveen *babu* is aiming at self-reliance of a different kind—Atmanirbhar Odisha. ■

RED CARPET FOR INDUSTRY

100,000 acres

Ready land bank for industry: state portal GO-PLUS shows location-specific industrial plots with details of connectivity and other physical and social infrastructure. Post land allotment problems resolved by Odisha Industrial Infrastructure Development Co.

25 days

Deadline for clearing projects, via GO-SWIFT single-window facility

3-5 years

Project completion deadlines–3 years for MSMEs, 5 years for big projects

1.5 million

Local youth to be re-skilled over the next 5 years by the Odisha Skill Development Authority

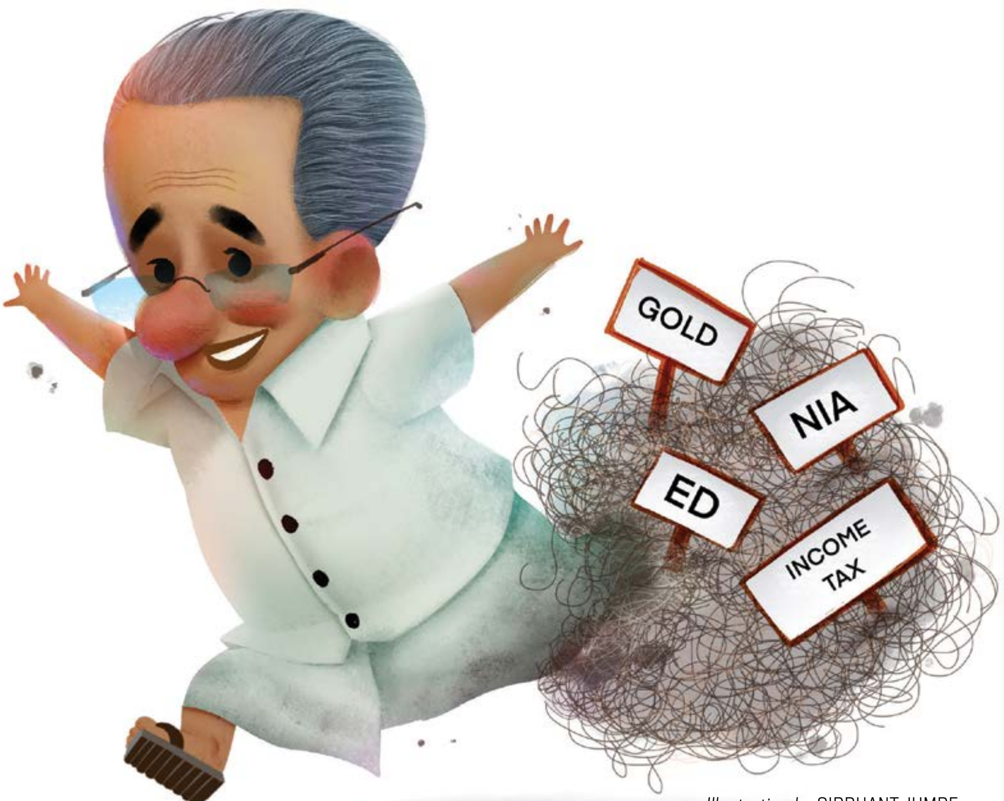

Illustration by SIDDHANT JUMDE

GLASSHOUSE

DIGGING FOR GOLD

Kerala chief minister **Pinarayi Vijayan** had suffered severe embarrassment last year after it was alleged that his principal secretary M. Sivasankar was involved with a Dubai-based gold smuggling ring. The network had allegedly used UAE diplomats to smuggle 30 kg of gold worth Rs 15 crore into the state. Now, 14 months later, Vijayan can finally breathe easy since the five central investigative agencies involved in the probe have failed to unearth any evidence against him. Though not for lack of trying. A prime accused in the case recently claimed that the agencies had asked him to implicate the chief minister and other key political figures in the state. Vijayan can now get on with the not inconsiderable task of governance.

TRADING PUNCHES

PTI

The game of tit-for-tat between the Centre and Maharashtra continues. On October 7 and 9, the Income Tax department raided companies and offices associated with Maharashtra deputy chief minister and senior NCP leader **Ajit Pawar**. Almost on cue, on October 9, the Mumbai police summoned CBI chief Subodh Jaiswal in a phone-tapping, data leak case. The city police reports to the NCP-run home ministry, so the timing is no coincidence.

Mother Knows Best

PTI

The family-run Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) has two former chief ministers, one Rajya Sabha MP, one leader of the opposition and one party rebel within the clan. So, recently when the off-and-on civil war between Tejashwi Yadav, the de facto RJD chief, and elder brother Tej Pratap, an RJD rebel, flared up again, they didn't have to look beyond the family for a mediator. Former Bihar CM **Rabri Devi**, who lives in Delhi with husband and RJD founder Lalu Prasad Yadav, flew to Patna to play moderator for her warring sons.

–Sandeep Unnithan with Jeemon Jacob, Amitabh Srivastava, Kiran D. Tare, Amarnath K. Menon

OPEN DOOR POLICY

Gujarat chief minister **Bhupendra Patel** wants his bureaucrats to meet MLAs without appointments on Mondays and Tuesdays. It seems MLAs blamed the tardy pace of development activities in their constituencies on inaccessible bureaucrats. And with elections round the corner, the newbie CM is going the extra mile to humour his MLAs.

NUMEROLOGY UNO

In July, Telangana chief minister **K. Chandrashekar Rao** launched a scheme for a digital survey of farm lands in several villages from his Gajwel assembly constituency. The government chose 27 villages for the pilot survey because the digits added up to KCR's lucky number—nine. Three months later, though, the project is yet to take off. The government is yet to identify the villages or the agencies to conduct the survey. Time for a new lucky number?

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IN SEARCH OF A ‘BETTER NORMAL’

RAJWANT RAWAT

From climate change to the pandemic, from the economy to a geopolitical power shift... The 19th edition of the India Today Conclave made sense of the four big drifts that will reshape our lives this decade

By AROON PURIE

IN MARCH 2020, we had to cancel the India Today Conclave due to Covid. Eighteen months later, we met under unusual circumstances, ringed in by rules of survival and social distancing that made it difficult for us to meet in ways that were once easy and familiar. In a sense, this is a metaphor for our times.

The past few months have been a time of upheaval, loss and uncertainty. We have experienced a deadly pandemic. We have seen the world's superpowers stumble with crumbling infrastructure. We faced an unprecedented shortage of medical oxygen, and watched our loved ones suffer.

We have seen extreme weather—floods, fires, storms—engulf the world. We have witnessed the mass migration of people and stark economic disparities. There has been ugly political polarisation, desperate protests, loss of livelihood and crippling digital divides. Millions of children have fallen out of school and face blank futures. Many have lost their livelihood. At personal levels, too, many have experienced extreme loneliness and isolation. Depression and mental health issues have shot up. In a line, this has been a period of devastating disruption and precariousness.

But every crisis is an opportunity to imagine something new. The human spirit is intrinsically resilient. It seeks inspiration. It wants to Reboot. Reconnect. Revitalise.

The theme for the 19th edition of the India Today Conclave, therefore, was a Better Normal. We spent two days not so much looking back as looking forward. We sought new ideas and new ways of doing things. Problems were addressed in the hope of seeking solutions. There are four momentous challenges facing the world and India.

The first is climate change, which we are witnessing all around us. Experts have called this the most decisive decade in human history with regard to climate change. If we're going to save humanity, the time for deliberation is over: it's time for action.

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INDIA TODAY CONCLAVE 2021

YASIR IQBAL

“We are today living in a Covid world. Every sphere of our public and personal life has changed and will change further. We are all in it together, the virus does not respect boundaries of any kind. We are asking for a rethink. We must create a Better Normal”

Don’t think this does not affect you. India has committed to cutting its greenhouse gas emissions by at least 33 per cent by 2030. This will lead to many changes in the way we live. We will have to find innovative ideas to build a green economy in India.

The second is the pandemic and public health. How are we going to live with the coronavirus and what do we need to do for the future? The coronavirus has occupied our mind space for the better part of two years. There are still many unknowns. How long will the various vaccines protect us? How will the virus mutate? Is there such a thing as herd immunity? When will the pandemic end? And many more questions. We must work together to find answers and push for better and more robust healthcare.

The third is the economy. The pandemic has put economies across the world into a tailspin. Every country is wondering what kind of recovery they will have. Economists are coming up with an alphabet soup of models—K shaped or V or U or even Z. The Indian economy was declining for six quarters before the pandemic. And then came the shock of the pandemic. To control the spread of the virus, the country was forced to go into several lockdowns. The result was the worst contraction of the Indian economy seen in recent history. The world economy is in a churn, too; global supply chains have been disrupted.

What measures will help the country emerge from this difficult economic period? What are the new opportunities for India in the changing world? What’s happening with markets? And what is the world of cryptocurrency? I am personally pleased to see that privatisation and asset monetisation have become part of our political lexicon. They are no longer dirty words as they were in the past. This is a long overdue change.

The fourth is the global power shifts. There is an aggressive China and a self-interested America. All in the shadow of the American withdrawal from Afghanistan and the rise of the Taliban. It seems the next hot zone for global diplomacy will be our neighbourhood. We live in a volatile zone, and on the 20th anniversary of 9/11, it is sobering to recall that what happens in Afghanistan has repercussions everywhere. The past two years have seen dramatic shifts in power—the rise of a multi-polar world, an expansionist China, a “diminished America”, and a return of the Taliban. But beneath these shorthand phrases lie many complexities. China is rising, but it’s also slowing and ageing. America is in the mood to withdraw from its foreign policy interventions but is still the world’s largest military and economic power. And the Taliban insists it has changed even as its most hardline factions take control. Meanwhile, Pakistan has its nefarious designs behind the scenes. I believe the recent developments in Afghanistan pose a clear and present danger to India.

So, how should we deal with this complex power matrix? The conclave programme was designed keeping these major themes in mind. And we had a brilliant spectrum of speakers on these subjects. A Pulitzer prize winner, generals, academics, doctors, athletes, actors, economists, businessmen, gamers, climate activists, entrepreneurs, politicians and thought leaders from across the world who are passionate about building a brighter future. It was a jam-packed programme with 78 speakers generating a tsunami of ideas.

We are today living in a Covid world. We must learn to live with it the best way we can. Every sphere of our public and personal life has changed and will change further. One thing the pandemic has taught us is that we are all in it together. The virus respects no boundaries of any kind.

Everyone is vulnerable. We are asking for a rethink. We must create a Better Normal. I hope this special magazine edition of the conclave puts you on this path. ■

▶ **TRACK CHANGE: WHY HUMANS MUST RACE TO ZERO**

BILL GATES *Co-chair, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation*

Brave New World

Five years before the Covid pandemic began, Bill Gates predicted that the next thing to kill over 10 million people would be an infectious virus. His latest warnings about an upcoming climate disaster have many alarmed. From how to de-carbonise 70 per cent of the world economy to the development of affordable green products, he sees innovation playing a big role in switching the world over to clean energy-based technology. He sets a tight timeline, saying we need to invent all the new technology we need in the next decade so that we have another 20 years after that to bring global greenhouse gas emissions down from 51 billion tonnes per year to zero by 2050. ■

INDIA TODAY CONCLAVE 202

CHANDRADEEP KUMAR

ON THE THREAT OF CLIMATE CHANGE, THE TECHNOLOGY OF TOMORROW, AND WHAT WE NEED TO DO TODAY

"Rich countries have a particular obligation to [invest in] innovation to cut the costs of green products. We can already see some leading companies working on [such problems]–what these products might look like, how we can scale up solar even more, how [to produce affordable] green hydrogen. The key point is you cannot expect the average citizen not to expect more travel, better [homes]… Innovations to multiply those large-scale activities by zero in terms of their emissions, and policies that accelerate that–this is where I get my optimism and belief"

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Clean energy products have to be affordable and scalable so that even the poorest can access and use them. The cost to go green is the greatest challenge facing the world
- Innovation will play a huge role in developing carbon-free alternatives to popular human activities that generate large amounts of pollution, such as driving, flying, building and so on
- Government policy will have a big role to play in ensuring markets can be created for innovative green products, and that even if these products are currently expensive, the volume of demand can eventually drive the price down
- Clean hydrogen or green hydrogen could help in making steel instead of hydrocarbons, thereby reducing toxic emissions. Such substitutes in popular manufacturing will help reduce pollution as well
- There are no quick fixes to the problems of climate change and the time to act to prevent irreversible damage is now

"With climate change, there is no quick solution… We have to start the work to stop the emissions now, because the scale is so big and the number of areas of activities that create these emissions are so broad. Particularly for countries near the Equator—including India—the effects of climate change over the course of the century will be very dramatic"

……

"The cost to go green is simply unacceptable even for the rich countries, not to mention middle-income countries like India, and so the path to salvation is huge innovations including things like clean hydrogen or direct air capture or scaling up electric cars and electric trucks to a super high level to take over the way we presently do every one of those activities"

……

"The pandemic is making everything more complicated, but if we can get the leaders [on board] and we hear stronger commitments—like China talked a little bit about not financing coal plants—and if they really follow through on [those commitments] both domestically and internationally, I view that as progress"

▶ **INNER ENGINEERING:** Triumphs. Challenges. Introspection. And what makes the BJP tick

JAGAT PRAKASH NADDA ,
President, Bharatiya Janata Party

The Saffron Engine

It was not an easy job for Jagat Prakash Nadda to assume the BJP's national leadership. He had to make a mark in a space vacated by three illustrious predecessors—Nitin Gadkari, Rajnath Singh and Amit Shah. Yet, as the national president of the saffron party, Nadda has carved out his own path and doesn't seem anxious about being overshadowed by any legacy. He credits this smooth transition to the tradition of collective leadership practised within the BJP. At the India Today Conclave, Nadda opened up about the party's road map for the future, its stand on contentious issues such as the farmers' protests and the secret behind the BJP's formidable election record in recent times. ■

Photograph by BANDEEP SINGH

ON THE BJP LEADERSHIP AND ROAD MAP FOR THE FUTURE

“The BJP is a party with an ideological background. We are cadre-based and have a mass following. We work with collective wisdom under the dynamic leadership of PM Modi. We work in continuity...we are a party where the older generation always gives way to the younger. We have appointed a lot of young chief ministers...we give opportunities to new people. We do new experiments. There is a dynamism in the BJP”

“There are states where we are in the Opposition and regional parties are in power. We feel a strong ideological party should take over in these states. I will work all my life for the BJP to achieve these goals”

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The BJP believes in collective leadership. While ex-president Amit Shah is a phone call away, PM Modi, Rajnath Singh and Nitin Gadkari are part of the consultative process
- The BJP prepares for election well in advance. The party never stops preparing. President Nadda monitors every event and seeks accountability from workers
- The Opposition parties are using the protests to sabotage development with political motives
- Advice to the Opposition: Patience is very important. Those who have no patience cannot be a good Opposition

ON PRIYANKA GANDHI’S ACTIVE ROLE IN UTTAR PRADESH

“Symbolism and photographs do not change things on the ground. The Gandhis are using the methods of the 1970s and 1980s. The world has progressed. The public knows what the truth is and what is acting. Politics is not about flamboyance and glamour in the 21st century”

ON THE BJP’S PREPARATION FOR THE UP ASSEMBLY POLL

“The BJP’s Uttar Pradesh election preparation started much earlier. We are always planning. This may sound arrogant, but what people are doing now, we already did much earlier”

ON THE ONGOING FARMERS’ PROTEST AND THE LAKHIMPUR KHERI INCIDENT IN WHICH UNION MoS FOR HOME AJAY MISHRA’S SON IS ACCUSED OF BEING INVOLVED IN THE DEATH OF EIGHT PEOPLE, INCLUDING FOUR FARMERS

“When the farm law provisions have been suspended for 18 months, when the government is ready for a dialogue, why is the dialogue not happening? You can bring the horse to the water; you can’t force it to drink. If people have misconceptions, we can clear their doubts. If people are factually incorrect, we can explain to them the correct facts. But let me tell those who are on the street with political motives that the BJP will not be shaken by this”

“We should not see this incident (Lakhimpur Kheri) from the election point of view but from a human angle. It is an unfortunate incident and, as the BJP president, I’ll say that the law will take its course. Nobody is above the law; no stone will be left unturned in the probe. At the same time, we must also ponder over the mode of democratic protests... Democratic processes are not curbed like this. The opposition parties must understand this”

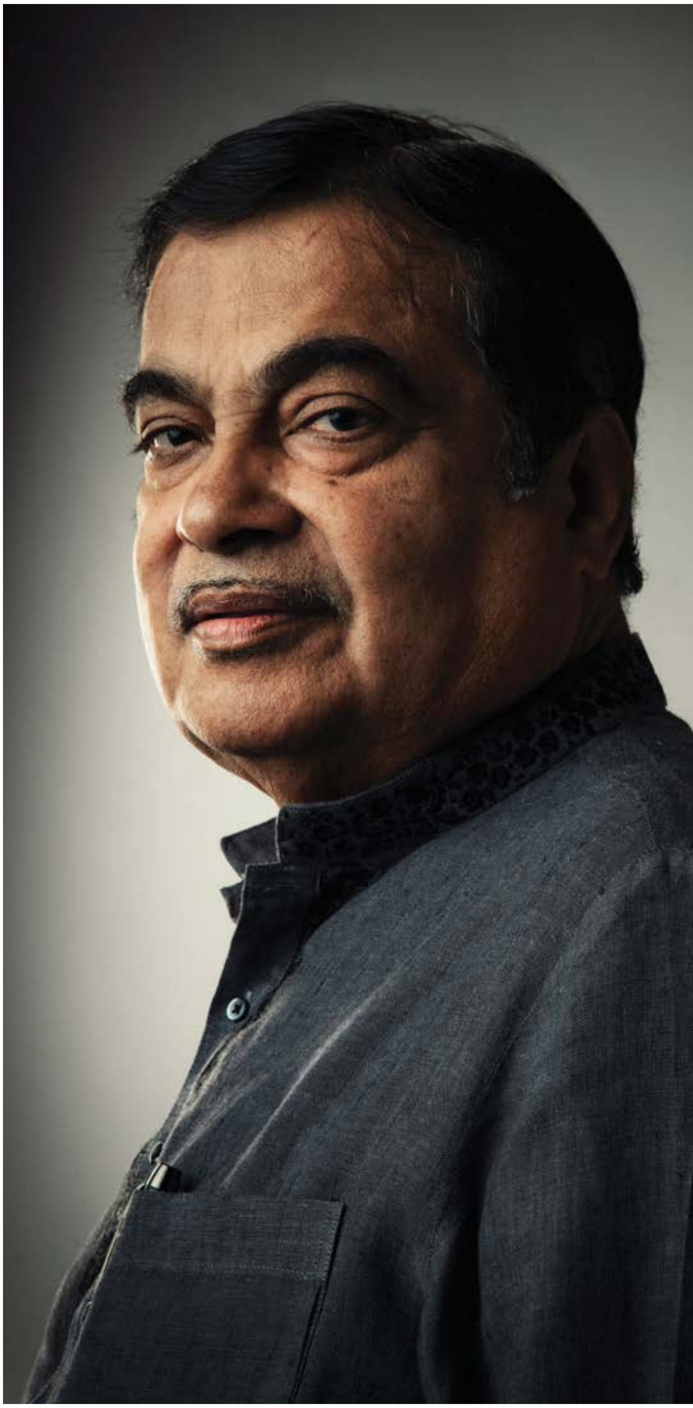
▶ **MISSION ELECTRIC: Meet the pathfinders. How India is moving to a green economy**

NITIN GADKARI *Union Minister for Road Transport and Highways*

Wheels in Motion

There can't be a better person than surface transport minister Nitin Gadkari to talk about electric vehicles, alternative fuels and improving highway infrastructure in the country. Gadkari is the minister selling the dream of cutting the highway trip from Delhi to Chandigarh or Dehradun from five hours to two, or travelling to Mumbai from the national capital in 12 hours. He is betting big time on lithium ion and alternative fuel-based vehicular traffic by the next decade, which will not only cut down on pollution and climate change effects but also reduce the dent on the country's current account balance. Gadkari was joined by two new-age entrepreneurs, Jeetender Sharma, MD & founder, Okinawa, and Ketan Mehta, founder & CEO, Hop Electric Mobility, who raised many of the challenges and opportunities in this transformation. ■

"The problems facing our country are pollution and the economy. Our import bill is up to Rs 8 lakh crore. And within five years, it will go up to Rs 25 lakh crore. By using petrol and diesel, we are generating more air pollution in the country. Today, we need to save this country from air, water and sound pollution. [We need] an import substitute, cost-effective solution, [which is] pollution-free and indigenous. The solution has to come from the auto sector"



BANDEEP SINGH

“Electric car sales increased annually by 140 per cent globally. Governments across the world spent $40 billion to support electric car sales. Globally, public charging stations reached 1.3 million units and the world is exploring charging options for heavy-duty electric trucks, development of mega chargers of 1 MW capacity. Here is the potential for India [to use our] intelligent engineering capability, talented manpower, availability of raw material, reduced production costs...”

“Almost 81 per cent of lithium-ion batteries are manufactured in India. Prices have fallen by 40-50 per cent. And with the vehicle scrappage policy, lithium and aluminium can be recycled. At our ports, the minimum draft is 18 metres, which will help in dismantling decommissioned ships from across the world. Instead of importing copper and aluminium, we can extract it from these ships.... There is talk of a Chinese monopoly on lithium mines...the fact is there is no shortage of lithium”

“In accidents, speeding is not always the culprit. On access-controlled green highways, nobody other than motorists can enter, so, there should be no problem raising the speed limit there. My personal opinion is we can have a speed limit of 120-140 kmph on such highways. On four-laned NHs, speeds up to 100 kmph. I have been trying to push through the ‘speed limit’ file, but court judgments come in the way. Now, I’ll go to Parliament, bring a bill on this and change the parameters of speed”

JEETENDER SHARMA

MD & Founder, Okinawa

“For EVs, the consumer has two anxieties. One is infrastructure, like charging stations. Another is; if I go out from my home whether I will get back or not. If you see, in the four-wheeler, you cannot go beyond 400 km a day. But if you talk about the two-wheeler, you will never ever go more than 60-70-80 km a day”

KETAN MEHTA

Founder & CEO, Hop Electric Mobility

“I’m talking about two-wheelers. Our stocks get finished overnight, it’s crazy. Rs 105 a litre petrol has helped. The FAME Policy, scrappage policy, all of this is helping us drive that future. I think after coming out of Covid and seeing the value of human lives, there is a realisation that we need to work for a sustainable future”

▶ **VITAMIN G:** **Designing booster shots for trade & commerce. A road map**

Growing Trade

Post-pandemic India is not only looking at recovery but also accelerating the growth trajectory. The world, says the Union minister for commerce and industry Piyush Goyal, is looking up to India as a trusted and reliable partner due to the government's effort to build a sustainable ecosystem for trade and commerce. India has used the Covid disruption to put in place a strategy to move to being a self-reliant economy, says Goyal. The government is determined to make India a global trade destination, he said, while commenting on favourable trade discussions, building infrastructure and stability in policy-making. The other speakers were Tata Steel CEO T.V. Narendran, KKR India chairman Sanjay Nayar and Snapdeal CEO Kunal Bahl. ■

KEY TAKEAWAYS

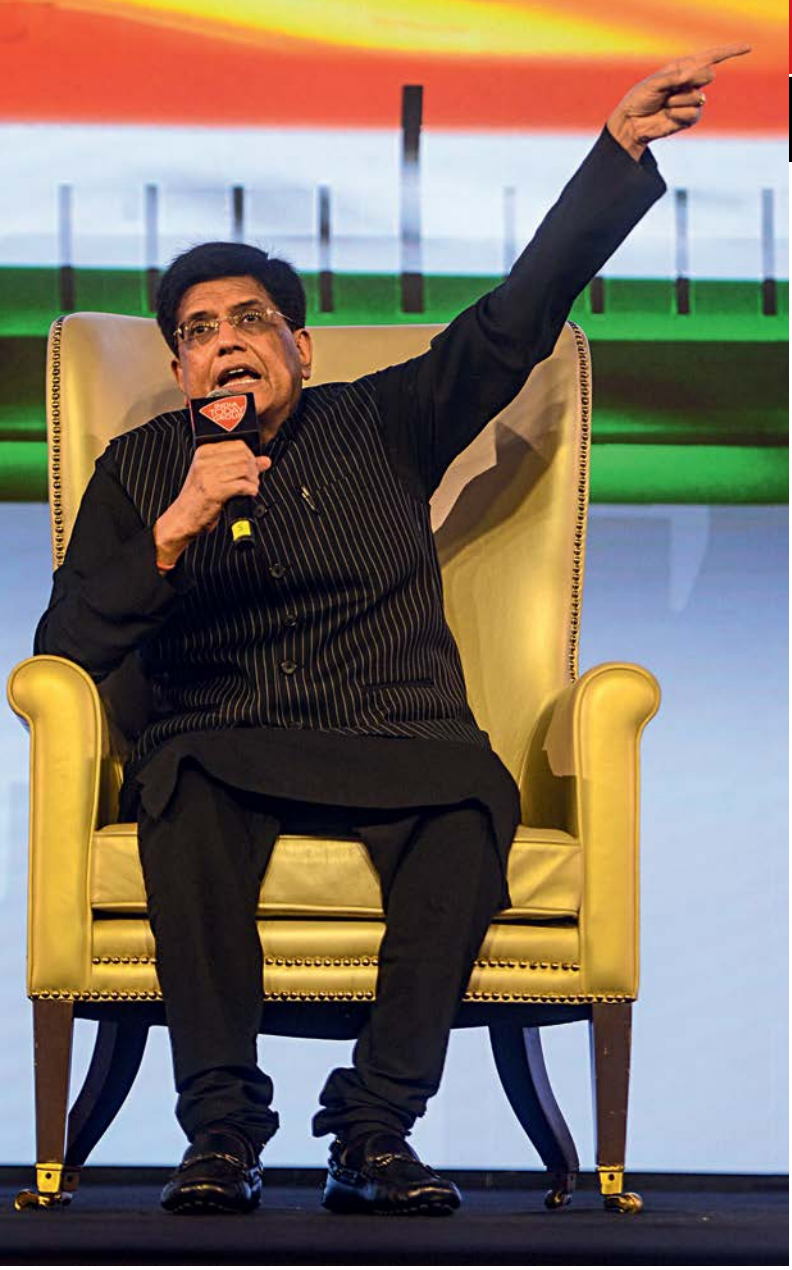
- The government has demonstrated its commitment to disinvestment by going ahead with the Air India sale
- Negotiators in advanced stages of talks to finalise FTAs with Canada, Australia, European Union, UAE
- Efforts are being made to facilitate investments with changes like PLI, decriminalisation of various laws governing businesses, stability in policies. Infra projects are thought through, analysing the impact on businesses and agriculture; rules and tariffs are being reworked to facilitate movement of goods (domestic as well as for exports)
- Goyal asserted that even during the Covid peak, India adhered to all its international commitments. He said this is a key reason why international players still value us
- Consumption is picking up in the economy, growth in GST, PMI, exports etc. are indicators of this

SANJAY NAYAR
Chairman, KKR India

"An asset monetisation plan is very important. You need serious bidders and you need to structure it well.... It's important to have local capital coming in along with participation of foreign capital and private capital"

"[On Air India] It's an inflection point. In fact, this is an ideological shift. They are selling it lock, stock and barrel. Instead of keeping it 30% here or 40% there. The move will give confidence. It's structured well and if this is the kind of model they [government] are going to follow, they will have a lot more success from here on"

KUNAL BAHL
CEO, Snapdeal



CHANDRADEEP KUMAR

PIYUSH GOYAL

Minister of Commerce & Industry; Consumer Affairs, Food & Public Distribution; and Textiles

ON INDIA GAINING FROM INVESTMENTS MOVING OUT OF CHINA

“We don’t think like this. Our policies are crafted and designed to meet India’s needs... and what is important for India to become a trusted partner to the rest of the world”

ON TATA’S PURCHASE OF AIR INDIA

“If I put my investment banker hat on again, I can vouch that this is an absolutely wonderful buy. With the Tata group coming in, to my mind, the ‘Maharaja’ is in safe hands”

Did you know: Piyush Goyal is the first Indian commerce minister to be the sherpa of a PM at multilaterals such as G20, G7 etc.

“There is too much focus on valuations and unicorns yet relatively less focus goes on the challenges start-ups solve. There are challenges, [but] with efficient use of technology and very innovative methods, solutions are presented”

“There is no other country where the government is so proactive, listening to stakeholders to resolve issues there and then. It gives immense confidence to the start-ups. Today, if a young 21-year-old girl from some Tier 2 or 3 town says she wants to start up, no one will doubt her capabilities”

T.V. NARENDRAN

Global CEO & MD, Tata Steel; President, CII

“We just had the CII national council a few days ago. The feedback from the CEOs is that they are expecting growth at 8.5-9.5%. There are [some] issues related to rising input costs, availability of containers, etc”

……

“As a group, we’ve grown up hearing a lot of stories about how JRD used to run Air India. I think it was an example of pursuit of excellence. And if you had a world-class airline, one of the global best many years back, why not now?”

▶ **CENTRAL VISTA CURTAIN-RAISER**

Unveiling democracy's new face

New Horizons

The Narendra Modi government's ambitious Central Vista Redevelopment Project has been under the spotlight since it was conceptualised. Though the Supreme Court has allowed the government to go ahead with the renovation project, Opposition leaders and activists have expressed concerns over its aesthetics, cost and impact on the environment. The exercise aims to redevelop a 3.2 km stretch called the Central Vista that lies at the heart of Lutyens Delhi built by the British in the 1930s. It involves demolishing and rebuilding several government buildings, including iconic landmarks, and constructing a new Parliament at a total cost of Rs 20,000 crore. It is expected to be completed by 2022, when India celebrates 75 years of Independence. At the India Today Conclave, the Union Minister for Housing and Urban Affairs Hardeep Singh Puri and Bimal Patel, the architect of the Central Vista project, addressed the several apprehensions regarding the project. ■

BANDEEP SINGH

HARDEEP SINGH PURI

Union Minister of Housing & Urban Affairs; Union Minister of Petroleum & Natural Gas

"A narrative has come up around Central Vista, some imaginary, some fanciful. The set of buildings we now refer to as Central Vista were conceptualised sometime around 1910. The building now [in use] was never designed to be Parliament... [but] a council house of a colonial power... the current Parliament building does not have the capacity to accommodate all members. The number of members has been increasing since Independence. Internal adjustments had to be made, like five people sitting in a space for two. It is an unsafe building as Delhi lies in seismic zone IV. The new building has been designed as per the parameters of seismic zone V"

"During the pandemic, we had several ongoing projects. Why did the activists pick up Central Vista and move court? The Delhi High Court has imposed a punitive fine on them"

BIMAL PATEL

Architect of the Central Vista and President, CEPT University

"We have to create facilities where an expanded house can sit. The key thing is to make a building that functions well... Parliament's new building will have a triangular shape to reflect triangles being a sacred geometry in various religions...this will be a building with most modern facilities but displaying our culture and tradition as well"

BANDEEP SINGH

▶ **RAISE HIGH THE ROOF BEAMS:** Unleashing the transformative power of sport in India

Higher, Stronger —Faster?

India won seven medals at the Tokyo Olympics, including a first-ever athletics gold medal. These historic feats, however, cannot take away from the fact that a country of more than a billion people ended up 48th in the medals tally. Union sports minister Anurag Thakur and his predecessor Kiren Rijiju discussed the government's vision on making India a sporting superpower. ■

ANURAG THAKUR

Union Minister for Information & Broadcasting, Youth Affairs and Sports

"The first issue is creating a sporting culture, from a 'stopping culture' to a sporting culture, from people's participation to people's movement. It is very important to nurture and infuse these kind of feelings...there is a larger role to be played by the Centre, state governments, national sports federations, educational institutes and the private sector, including NGOs and corporates. Sports is a state subject"

"Our educational institutes need to promote a sports culture. If you look at universities in the US such as Stanford...one university accounts for a large share of the medals won by the US. How many universities in India are making that kind of contribution?"

ANURAG THAKUR

CHANDRADEEP KUMAR

KIREN RIJIJU

Union Minister for Law & Justice

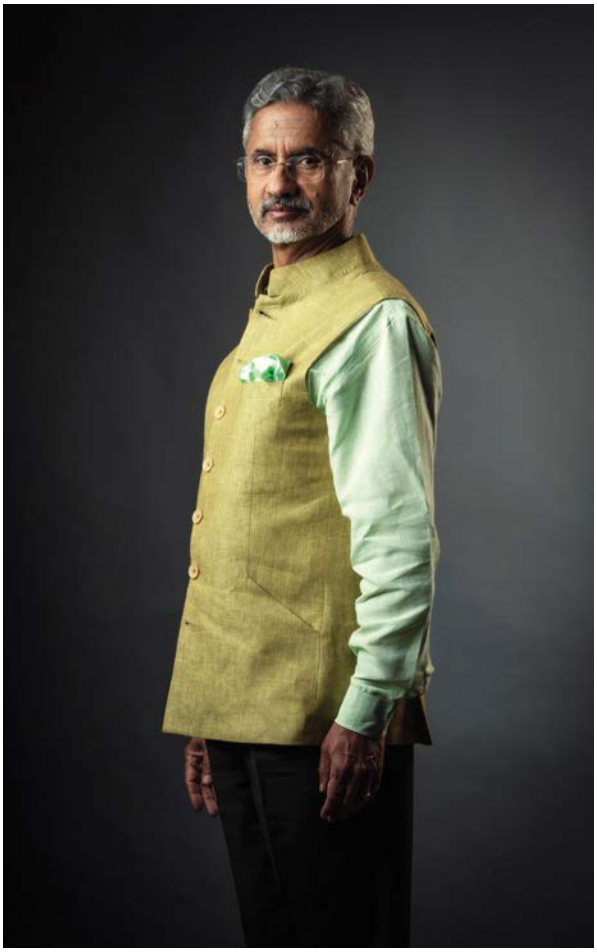
"The impression is the athletes are suffering as the government is not doing enough. No other government spends as much money or is involved as much as the Indian government in sports. The government is not supposed to create sports infrastructure...it must be managed professionally"

"When an athlete wins a medal, only then will people celebrate...that is why the Cheer4India campaign was started during the Olympics to involve the citizens. Cricket is successful here because people watch the game. When I was the sports minister, people used to ask me why we don't promote other sports like cricket. The government doesn't give money to cricket, it comes from the people. Until and unless people join the sports movement, we cannot turn into a sporting powerhouse"

▶ **MAPS & MINEFIELDS:** Insights on concerns, triumphs & India's foreign policy priorities

Prepared for Turbulence

S. Jaishankar is India's foreign minister at an extremely challenging time. The Taliban takeover of Afghanistan has put Pakistan in the driver's seat in Kabul. The Indian mission in Afghanistan has withdrawn from a country in which New Delhi invested for two decades. A belligerent China has breached nearly three decades of diplomacy. Its collusion with Pakistan and the sharply altered geopolitics of the region present challenges unlike those seen in recent decades.



BANDEEP SINGH

S. JAISHANKAR

Union Minister for External Affairs

ON THE LINE OF ACTUAL CONTROL

"Things have changed enormously (in Ladakh)...they brought forces up...we counter deployed.... There has been no lack of resolve or firmness in what we have to do to protect our national security. I have every confidence the Indian armed forces will do what they have to do to protect this country and I expect everybody else who is patriotic to have the same confidence"

……

ON CHINA

"I have still not heard a credible explanation as to why China chose to bring that size of forces to the border. If peace and tranquility are disturbed and attempts made to change the LAC, the status quo, unilaterally and large forces are brought in contravention of the written agreement, then, obviously, the relationship will be impacted"

……

ON AFGHANISTAN

"The situation in Afghanistan is still unfolding, there is still lack of clarity. The general sense in the international community is that there are some basic expectations of Afghanistan. The most basic is that Afghan soil will not be used for terrorism against other countries. There are also expectations about the nature of the government, that it would be inclusive"

……

ON PAKISTAN

"[When you ask me if India and Pakistan will talk again], you [need to] tell me when do you see Pakistan becoming a normal country, one that doesn't sponsor and execute terrorism against its neighbours, that treats its neighbours on an MFN basis, that has connectivity with its neighbours, that allows people to move on the basis of visas, the way we do with all our other neighbours! There is no other country today that actually runs this scale of terrorism against the neighbourhood"

BANDEEP SINGH

▶ **IN A VOLATILE WORLD:**
Rebalancing India's foreign policy

High-wire Diplomacy

A challenging external environment immediately translates into greater challenges for India's foreign policy. Not only is unipolarity giving way to multipolarity but the balance of economic power is shifting towards Asia. For India, a triumvirate of threats—an aggressive China, a resurgent Taliban and a triumphant man-in-the-middle, Pakistan, which continues to use terrorism as a tool—presents a fresh set of challenges for the country's diplomats. Foreign secretary Harsh V. Shringla, the man in the hot seat, spoke of the road ahead for Indian diplomacy. ■

HARSH V. SHRINGLA
Foreign Secretary of India

ON AFGHANISTAN

"We have seen the formation of a (Taliban) government that is far from inclusive or representative. You have seen the DG of the ISI go there and facilitate a government that has 35 members of the cabinet who are designated individuals in the UN Security Council's list, so that's not a great start"

……

ON CHINA

"Until we get full satisfaction that the situation that has arisen as a result of Chinese assertiveness along our border areas last year is resolved, we will not be able to restore our relationship to the levels that were there before Covid or before 2020"

……

ON PAKISTAN

"It is incumbent on Pakistan to ensure that there is no attempt or no direct impact of cross-border terrorism on India from any of its territories. Unless (that) commitment is fulfilled, we certainly would have serious issues. The continuing impact of cross-border terrorism would also have its own impact"

▶ **CM CONFIDENTIAL:** On the BJP's agenda. Breaching the South

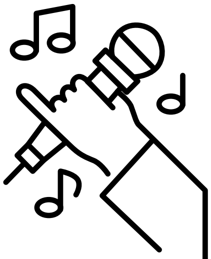
BASAVARAJ BOMMAI,
Chief Minister, Karnataka

Politics of Performance

Basavaraj Bommai, who had his political roots in the Janata Parivar, was made the Karnataka chief minister on July 28 following the exit of state BJP strongman B.S. Yediyurappa. Known as a moderate voice in the right-wing party (which he had joined in 2008), the 61-year-old chief minister has often acted as a trouble-shooter for the party, particularly during legislature stalemates. Now tasked with heading the state, he has his job cut out—fight anti-incumbency against the government and stabilise the faction-ridden party. The son of a former chief minister, Bommai has experience in several administrative roles, and has shown no signs of being cowed down by the legacy of his predecessor. In his first-ever detailed interaction on a national media platform, Bommai offered glimpses of his personality, style of governance and political philosophy. The engineer-turned-politician claims that no single caste can determine the consequence of elections anymore. Instead, it's the politics of performance that counts in the game of votes. ■

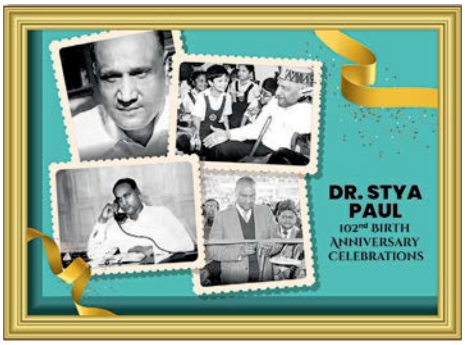
NOTES BEYOND POLITICS

The India Today Conclave discovered Bommai's singing talent as he crooned Hindi film songs in front of the camera. An avid cricket follower with a sharp memory for statistics, he revealed that his favourite cricketers were Gundappa Viswanath and Dilip Sardesai



BANDEEP SINGH

> "The narrative that the BJP is a Lingayat-centric party is because most BJP MPs and MLAs get elected from north Karnataka. Without the support of all classes, no party can come to power. The SCs, STs, OBCs, Vokkaligas, they have also supported the party. The BJP is now a party of all classes in Karnataka
>
> Our party principle is that a strong Centre and strong states make a strong nation. As far as administration is concerned, there are certain issues where you have to consult the Centre... and sometimes the Centre consults us
>
> Petrol and diesel prices will come down significantly if petroleum products are brought under GST"



Dr. Stya Paul's 102nd Birth Anniversary celebrates

the life and times of the visionary with a mission

Dr Stya Paul
October 4, 1919 – June 7, 2010
der Chairman, Apeejay Stya and Svran Group
Birth Anniversary Celebration

Mrs. Sushma Paul Berlia, President, Apeejay Stya Group and Svran Group, offers a Vinamra Shraddhanjali to her father, Dr. Stya Paul

Mr. Suhas L Yathiraj, IAS, District Magistrate of Gautam Budh Nagar, delivering the chief guest's address at the 102nd birth anniversary celebrations of Dr. Stya Paul

The Apeejay Stya family recently commemorated the 102nd Birth Anniversary of Dr. Stya Paul – a visionary, eminent industrialist, educationist, philanthropist, freedom fighter and inspiration behind the Apeejay Stya and Svran Group, in a virtual mega celebration. It paid obeisance to the indomitable spirit of 'an ordinary man who rose to extraordinary heights' and the values he stood for.

Shri Suhas Yathiraj, IAS, District Magistrate, Gautam Budh Nagar, who has done the entire nation proud by winning the Silver Medal at the Tokyo Paralympics 2020 was the esteemed Chief Guest for the occasion. Musician par excellence Shri Hariharan mesmerised the audience in a virtual music concert.

Speaking on the occasion, Mrs Sushma Paul Berlia, President, Apeejay Stya Group and Svran Group said, "**Dr. Stya Paul was born a very ordinary man, but a man who rose to extraordinary heights.** The reason that we want to celebrate his life is to commemorate, to remember, to be inspired by and to take forward all that he stood for and exemplified in his life," she stated. "**Each one of us has the potential within us to become the grandest versions of who we are.** But many of us don't allow ourselves to bloom as we get lost in day to day activities without understanding the purpose for which we are in this world," she added.

Mrs Berlia paid a rich tribute to her father, Dr. Stya Paul while remembering the fascinating journey of his life from humble beginnings to the pinnacle of success and glory, despite many challenges including a physical one.

Dr. Stya Paul's legacy of excellence is being carried forward by his daughter and only child, Mrs Sushma Paul Berlia. Mrs Sushma Paul Berlia is a leading woman entrepreneur and educationist of the country who has made outstanding contributions to industry and education. Dr. Stya Paul's son-in-law, Mr Vijay Berlia and grandsons – Mr Nishant and Mr Aditya Berlia, along with granddaughter Dr. Neha Berlia -- also attended the event.

Shri Suhas L. Yathiraj said, "Seeing the kind of work Dr. Stya Paul has put in, I think he is a legend." In an inspiring address, which motivated thousands of Apeejay Students, Shri Yathiraj said, "If you really want something in your life, put your heart and soul into it, then destiny will conspire to give you that thing. If we think about the greatest scientific achiever of the 20th century after Einstein, **it is Stephen Hawking. He couldn't get up from his wheelchair, write or communicate. If he can become one of the best scientists of the century**, we very well do not have any excuse for what we can't achieve in life," he added.

All the students who have received the "Dr. Stya Paul Award for Human Values" for the session 2021-22 were also applauded during the function. This prestigious award is presented each year on Founder's Day to select students for imbibing core human values and diligently practicing them in life through their actions, behaviour and conduct. The soul-stirring songs by music maestro Shri Hariharan, comprised Bhajans, ghazals and some of his famous film songs. The mega online event was attended by thousands of viewers globally, including eminent dignitaries and Apeejayites.

▶ **CM CONFIDENTIAL:** The politics of population & polarisation

HIMANTA BISWA SARMA *Chief Minister, Assam*

Keeper of the Faith

Assam has historically been a conflict zone over identity, land and resources. From border clashes to eviction drives, the recent flashpoints have put the spotlight on Himanta Biswa Sarma. The newly elected chief minister explains his political philosophy and model of governance at the India Today Conclave.

ON WHY THE ASSAM GOVERNMENT HAS BANNED BEEF CONSUMPTION AND SALE WITHIN A 5 KM RADIUS OF A TEMPLE

"Most Muslims in Assam are converts from Hinduism. Their forefathers did not consume beef. If I'm just reminding them of that and asking them to restrict their consumption of beef, what's wrong in that? Some people get angry when I remind them of their own civilisation. They talk about rights. Rights derive from civilisational values. In Assam, Muslims are happy with this decision of restricting consumption of beef within a radius of five km of a temple. It has enhanced communal harmony"

ON WHY HE IS NOT SEEKING MIYA VOTES*

"I don't want *miya* votes. We don't have a political relationship. They don't vote for the BJP, so I don't campaign in their areas. I'll work for their development but not seek their votes. We live in harmony"

**colloquial reference to Bangla-speaking immigrant Muslims*

ON THE VIRAL VIDEO OF CONGRESS GENERAL SECRETARY PRIYANKA GANDHI SWEEPING THE FLOOR OF THE GUEST HOUSE WHERE SHE WAS DETAINED IN SITAPUR, UP, AFTER TRYING TO VISIT LAKHIMPUR KHERI

"I have always seen my mother sweeping the floor at home. The public won't be impressed. This is nothing big. How can a woman sweeping the floor be news? The way she (Priyanka) was sweeping the floor was also not the right technique"

THE NIGHT WATCHMAN

After clearing files till 2 am, Sarma sleeps at 3 am and wakes up at 7 am. The habit began in his hostel days in Cotton College, Guwahati

ON THE RECENT EVICTION DRIVE IN ASSAM'S DHOLPUR AREA THAT TURNED VIOLENT

"We evicted people from Dholpur because they were illegally encroaching [on] government land. How can 1,000 families occupy 77,000 acres of land? The land policy in Assam says that one family cannot occupy more than two acres of land. We have to give land to many landless people. We have to evict people if they encroach on land. Eviction is a continuous process. Local Assamese people are also being evicted. There is no communal angle to this. When Assamese-speaking people or tribal people are evicted, Left liberals don't cry for them"

Photograph by BANDEEP SINGH

▶ **MAJORITY, MINORITY:** The battle of belonging. How to rethink the Muslim question in India

ARIF MOHAMMAD KHAN
Governor, Kerala

Being Indian

Numbering over 200 million, or nearly 15 per cent of our population, India's Muslims represent the largest Muslim-minority population in the world. With a polarising narrative in recent years, Muslims in India face a genuine predicament. Often used as a vote bank by the political class, they have been at the receiving end of either selective appeasement or social isolation. While facing increasing intolerance, critics often blame Muslims for their own isolation by pointing to the allegedly regressive views or traditions of particular sections of the community. Worse, there have been very few representative voices for Muslims at the national level. Kerala Governor Arif Mohammad Khan has been known for his reformist views on Muslims and their space in India. At the India Today Conclave, he talked about finding a sane approach to reducing the widening religious faultlines in the country. ■

BANDEEP SINGH

“The term Hindu Rashtra is not used in any of our scriptures. Indian civilisation was never defined by religion. Other civilisations were defined by religion, race and language. The Constituent Assembly included Hindu, Sikh, Jain, Buddhist in the definition of Hinduism, making it clear that Hindu does not mean uniformity of belief or practices in the matter of religion. It is the duty of the political system to protect each one of them”

“The political class has failed miserably. It is the duty of the media to question us if we are not promoting the spirit of the Constitution”

“Stop promoting those who speak divisive language and promote separatist ideology. We need to build this feeling that our identity is Indian. In India, two people in the same family worship different gods and they don't feel threatened. Unless we strengthen this feeling of being Indian, these problems won't die down”

▶ **WATER WORKS:** Turn the tap. India's most crucial story

Liquid Ambitions

Changing weather patterns and recurrent droughts have left 250 of India's 700 districts with 'critical' or 'overexploited' groundwater levels. Yet the Jal Jeevan Mission aims to provide tap water connections to every household. Bureaucrat Bharat Lal and water conservationist Rajendra Singh debate India's water crisis and ways to improve water access.

BHARAT LAL

Additional Secretary (Water), Department of Drinking Water and Sanitation, Ministry of Jal Shakti

ON FUTURE PLANS

"In due course, we aim for water, sanitisation and hygiene-enlightened villages and children... pani samitis, NGOs, civil society are being involved in spreading awareness...15-member pani samitis are being created in every district of every state...people are being taught about the transfer of floodwater to reservoirs and other water-management techniques..."

CHANDRADEEP KUMAR

RAJENDRA SINGH

Water conservationist and environmentalist, popularly known as the 'Waterman' of India

ON THE EFFECTS OF CLIMATE CHANGE

"Twenty-eight per cent of India's total water reserve banks are safe as of now, but most of them are overdraft which means there is more discharge of water than recharge of reservoirs. Climate change is leading to more discharge... rain patterns are changing due to climate change, and farmers are unaware of the rain patterns... it is important to link crop patterns with rain patterns"

"The discharge and recharge balance has to be maintained, and it is possible only by community- and demand-driven decentralised management"

▶ **SEEDS OF WRATH:** Fear & Facts. How to Address Farm Crisis

The Angry Farmer

Since June 5 last year, farm unions in Punjab, parts of Haryana and Uttar Pradesh have been engaged in a standoff with the government over three new farm laws. The unions have so far stonewalled the government's offer to amend the laws, demanding nothing less than a repeal. Bharatiya Kisan Union (BKU) spokesperson Rakesh Tikait and RSS pracharak-turned-Meerut MP Rajendra Agrawal debated the issue in the shadow of the Lakhimpur Kheri violence.

BANDEEP SINGH

RAJENDRA AGRAWAL

Lok Sabha BJP MP from Meerut

"The prime minister has always addressed farmers' issues, there have been lots of discussions on the farmers' bills in Parliament, the issue has also reached the courts. Yet, there has been confusion for the past 11 months. Can they give even one reason why they are not satisfied with the decisions of the government? I feel their problem is not farmers or farming but something different. Maybe a political agenda..."

"The Narendra Modi government is very sensitive to farmers' issues. All decisions have been taken keeping the farmers in mind, whether it's their welfare or infrastructure improvement in the villages. If the infrastructure is good in the villages, then farmers do not have to leave their fields due to poverty and go to cities and work there"

RAKESH TIKAIT

Spokesperson, BKU

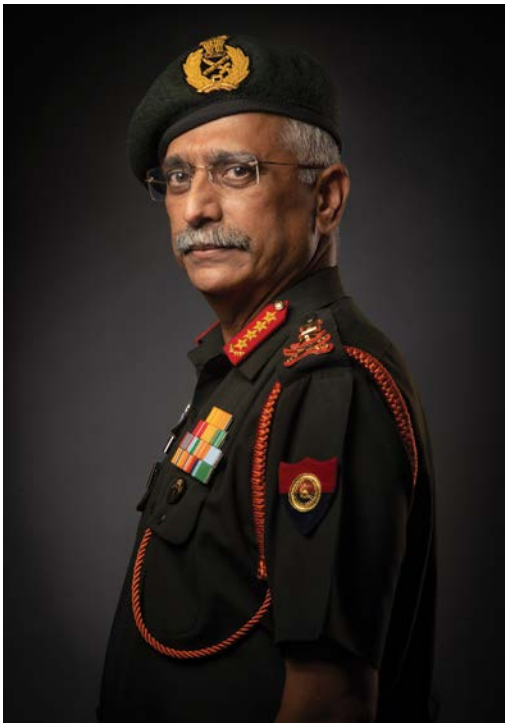
"The government says it's ready for talks but will not repeal the laws. What does it mean? The decision has already been made, it has been put on paper, the farmers are being called to put their signature. The farmers are ready for talks, but not with conditions"

"[What happened in Lakhimpur Kheri] was a reaction. [People were beaten up] by a mob after their vehicle mowed down four protesters and injured many others. The law says we should consider the reasons and the circumstances [in which a crime takes place]"

INDIA'S EMERGING NATIONAL SECURITY PARADIGM: Preparing for future wars

Boots on Ground

BANDEEP SINGH



GENERAL M.M. NARAVANE

Chief of Army Staff

For the first time since Independence, India's armed forces face the prospect of two live boundaries with its principal adversaries China and Pakistan. To the west, there is no slack in state-sponsored terrorism from Pakistan, with terrorists being pushed across the Line of Control. To the north, we have been engaged in a standoff with the People's Liberation Army of China along the Line of Actual Control in eastern Ladakh for 18 months. Add to that the arrival of new technologies such as drones and the continuing challenge of scarce budgetary resources and the long wish-list for new equipment. At the India Today Conclave, the Army chief Gen. Manoj Mukund Naravane made sense of these challenges and the road ahead for the world's second largest army.

ON PRESENT AND FUTURE CHALLENGES

"...the large-scale buildup [by China]...continues to be in place [to sustain which] there has been an equal amount of infrastructure development on the Chinese side. It means they are there to stay. We are keeping a close watch on these developments, but if they are there to stay, we are there to stay too... The buildup on our side is as good as the PLA's"

"The wars of the future will be more distinct. There will be more standoff weapons, more over the horizon strikes rather than the physical conflicts, the physical engagements, that we have been used to in the past"

"We have two unsettled borders, both on our west and on our north. The nature of these unsettled borders makes it very necessary to also have boots on ground, the physical occupation of territory to be able to stake our claim to it and to protect the territorial integrity"

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Post Ladakh, army's modernisation thrust more on Intelligence Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR) capability
- Difficult to fathom why the PLA mobilised along the LAC, given the pandemic and China's worries on its eastern seaboard. China unable to achieve its aims given the rapid response by Indian armed forces
- Renewed attempts by Pakistan to infiltrate terrorists across the Line of Control from end July onwards to September. But can't directly link to events in Afghanistan

▶ **BULL FRENZY:** **Soaring public markets, new-age IPOs and the new investment paradigm**

RAKESH JHUNJHUNWALA

Owner of Rare Enterprises, investor, trader & film producer

Ace Investor

Rakesh Jhunjhunwala first entered the stock market with just Rs 5,000 in 1985, and today is worth $5.6 billion. At a time when stock markets are rising, crossing the 60,000 mark last month, the "big bull" is among the most sought-after people in India for his advice on investment. Presently, his investment portfolio is worth an estimated Rs 40,000 crore. At the Conclave, Jhunjhunwala enthralled the audience with one-liners and tips for new investors. ■

My first turning point was the Rs 5,000 [that I entered the market with]. My brother was a practising chartered accountant, and he introduced me to some of his clients... The first way of getting capital was through the introductions and confidence my brother gave to his clients... I was able to raise about Rs 15 lakh and made about Rs 40-50 lakh from that in two years. The second turning point was the budget of Madhu Dandavate...

She (his wife Rekha) isn't bothered if she is a billionaire or is worth 200 million or 400... but I have ensured that if she divorces me, I don't have to pay alimony. I look at money in the way that even if I have 10, 15 per cent of the wealth that we have today, I'm going to drink the same whiskey, drive the same car, eat the same food, have the same holiday

I try to predict [where the] market is [going]. It's a prediction. Sometimes I'm right and sometimes I'm wrong. When I'm right, I feel very elated. When I'm wrong, I learn. The biggest cost of a mistake is not learning from it. And I'm not afraid to make a mistake

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Young investors and those new to the market should not treat it like a race course, but invest wisely
- The ability to take risks is an essential quality for investing in stock markets
- There is no need to panic about Covid–history has seen worse crises. Such crises also offer big opportunities
- One needs to keep learning from one's mistakes and should not be cowed down by failures
- India is at the beginning of an inflection point; the best days of the markets are yet to come

BANDEEP SINGH

ON TAKING CHANCES

“‘Risk’ is a four-letter word. It’s an adjective. It means different things to different people, right? But remember one thing—risk, debt, markets, weather—we can try to predict them, we cannot know them. Only the future will tell us what it is... Risk is the essence of life. If you don’t take risks, you [can do] nothing”

“

#I’m a very measured risk-taker, in the sense that I can sacrifice my assets and sell them at below par value... but I should never let my financier [control] me

#See, [the coronavirus is like] a flu, not a cancer. Humanity has faced greater challenges. After the Spanish flu, we had the roaring twenties in America. And remember that ‘crisis’ and ‘opportunity’ have the same symbol in Chinese

#This is not the first time in history that all these unicorns are there. What happened during the railroad boom? What happened during the internet boom? How many have survived? So that is history. That’s not my opinion. Valuations and markets are driven by human psychology. And that psychology has not changed, and will not change—greed and fear. So good luck, but I respect the internet promoters for their dedication, their hard work

#We have come into a phase that India, economically, has never seen before. We are living in a country with $1 trillion of savings... projected to rise to 3 trillion by 2030. Today, 31 per cent of household wealth in America is [in] equity. In India, it’s three per cent

”

▶ **SENSE IN SUSTAINABILITY:** Role of corporates in combating climate change

The Business of Going Green

For diversified conglomerate ITC, investing in sustainability and digital technology defines its vision for the future. ITC chairman and MD Sanjiv Puri, speaking at the India Today Conclave, reiterated his group's commitment to combat global warming through its business practices and illustrated that sustainability makes good business sense. The challenge of global warming is here to stay and companies have to find innovative ways of doing business in the new world.

BANDEEP SINGH

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Sustainability makes complete business sense–it is an economically viable option for corporates across sectors
- It takes time for sustainable practices to grow, but they help firms deliver high quality products and obtain rationing of operational costs
- Global warming is here and businesses cannot ignore its impact. Building sustainable businesses is the future

SANJIV PURI

Chairman and Managing Director, ITC Limited

"We need to commit ourselves to improving and building green infrastructure, green energy, green mobility, green buildings in ITC. That's a journey that we have traversed over two decades"

"While there are many [problems] for which solutions do not exist today—and I am sure they will be found over time—solutions are available in many areas. It is for us to [take] action and adopt them at scale to make an impact, because we owe it to future generations to leave a world that is much more secure and sustainable"

"I think the starting point is for all enterprises to set the ambition, to set the goals. The moment we do that, we will find innovative forces being unleashed in the enterprise, and new ways of working, different ways of thinking and newer models will emerge"

MANAGEMENT ADVICE

"I think there are areas like carbon-pricing etc. that can galvanise further action. We need to make it stronger. Second, it's a complex area. It cannot be done by any one company alone and we have to pursue the route of collaboration, pursue the route of public-private partnerships"

BANDEEP SINGH

▶ **THE RECKONING:** Debating India's economy. Causes for concern. And cheer

Pushing Reforms

With the successful sale of Air India, the Centre is hopeful about the post-pandemic period, with several big-ticket disinvestments in the offing. However, the economy remains precariously poised, with consumption and investment still in a slump. India's principal economic advisor Sanjeev Sanyal talked about the prospects of the economy and the progress the government has made in its reform agenda

SANJEEV SANYAL

Principal Economic Advisor, Ministry of Finance

"Our approach was not to revive the economy through demand management. You can use demand management for a safety net...you need to make sure that people don't starve, that you don't get cascades of defaults through the financial system and so on. So, we provided the support for that. But reviving the economy has to be a supply-side reform"

"Capitalism is not [just] about personal profit, it is [also] about creative destruction. New companies are born, old companies die, and if this happens as a result of the natural course of business shocks and so on, then it should be allowed to happen"

"This government has been quite unapologetic about privatisation. We have removed the old euphemism, 'disinvestment', and used the word 'privatisation'. We have also gone further and said we will monetise a lot of under-utilised assets"

"Let me put the record straight on this: much of what we are attempting to privatise was actually built by the private sector. Air India, in 1953, was simply taken away from the private sector and nationalised. In 1969, [several] banks were simply taken away and nationalised"

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The government has been bold with its reforms, and these will drive more investment into the country
- It is normal for companies to fail, because creative disruption is the essence of capitalism. Other players will take their place
- The post-Covid economy will need companies that have a different set of skills to tackle the new challenges
- Only better economic growth can provide more jobs
- Focusing reforms on the supply side has a better impact on economic growth

TONGUE IN CHEEK

"If anybody thought the Tatas should not have been purchasing Air India, they should have bid more than [the Tatas did] for it—we would have been happy to sell it to them"

▶ **HYDRA HEADS:** The roller-coaster world of cryptocurrencies. And what India should do about it

The Case for Crypto

India has seen a great deal of debate over cryptocurrency in the recent past. While some countries have already permitted cryptocurrencies like Bitcoin to be used as legal tender, India has treaded a cautious path, with talk of the country launching its own digital currency. At the Conclave, the founders and CEOs of cryptocurrency firms attempted to demystify these new digital tokens—which many believe are the future of currency—and how safe they are for investors

SUMIT GUPTA

Co-founder and CEO, CoinDCX

“Cryptocurrency is more like an asset class, a store of value [than] a currency... We have seen a lot of liquidity coming into the system. People are parking their money in cryptocurrencies as a store of value. So they are [being used] more like an asset class to diversify one’s portfolio and to grow wealth over time”

ASHISH SINGHAL

Co-founder and CEO, CoinSwitch Kuber

“Cryptocurrency, by its very nature, is democratic. Anyone, anywhere in India, with a smartphone and an internet connection, can be part of this revolution, starting with just Rs 100. But they have to choose the right platform, the right team behind it, the right security standards that the company follows, to make sure their money is always secure”

SANJAY MEHTA

Founder and Partner, 100X.VC

“Previously, we used to dig holes [to keep our money safe]. Then banks came in. Is it safe to give your money to somebody else to keep? Then the internet came in, and so did internet banking. This is the evolution of the user journey. Trust will [also build up around] digital money and assets”

KUNAL NANDWANI

Co-founder and CEO, uTrade Technologies

“In the past year, the markets have grown very well across asset classes. Cryptos are no different. The core factor behind this, besides the digital adoption and Covid, is that the US has printed close to $10 trillion. That money has come into the markets and has to go somewhere, so asset prices have gone up. That has helped [boost] the early adoption of cryptocurrencies”

SATHVIK VISHWANATH

Co-founder and CEO, Unocoin

“India is moving towards digitisation. We have a very tech-savvy population. There is also good penetration of smartphones and the internet. India also gets among the largest remittances from abroad. So India has a lot to gain by embracing this kind of technology”

▶ **UNICORN DIARIES:** How to make a billion. Frontline insights on the internet economy

The Magic Number

According to Nasscom, India gained 28 new unicorns–start-ups valued at $1 billion or more–in the first nine months of 2021, taking the total to 66. These firms have a combined revenue of over $15 billion, and employ over 330,000 people. At the Conclave, the heads of a few of India's more successful start-ups analysed the country's potential to birth more such firms, and how they could go on to do better on the world stage.

SANDEEP AGGARWAL

Founder, DROOM

"Innovation involves creating something that was not previously possible. The internet has made products and services geography-agnostic. For example, today, travel bookings are 80+ per cent online. Twenty-five years ago, if I had told someone that I wouldn't have to go anywhere to book tickets for travel, they would have laughed at me"

"I had been in Silicon Valley for 15 years, and had no plans to come back to India. I came back because I saw, in 2011, an opportunity to start my first venture, ShopClues. It was the first marketplace [of its kind] at the time. I was a Wall Street analyst and I saw this as [a big] opportunity–how often does one have the opportunity to create the Amazon or Alibaba of India?"

YASIR IQBAL

MAYANK KUMAR

Co-founder and MD, upGrad

"I believe this will be a decade of unicorns. These tech-enabled companies have the potential to reach a scale that is difficult in physical formats. With the [level of] capital coming in, the market opening up and digital infrastructure getting ready, there will be a decade of long-run growth for us"

ABHIRAJ BHAL

Founder and CEO, Urban Company

"To achieve unicorn status, I think you really have to focus on building a company that creates value for customers, for suppliers. Unicorn status is an outcome—you can't have that as your goal. The focus has to be on building a high-quality company that creates a lot of value for society, and the valuation will follow"

RAHUL GARG

Founder and CEO, Moglix

"I want to challenge the notion that there is a lot of money coming into India. If you look at the global economy, the money is still peanuts. What we think of as a large company–Rs 100 crore or Rs 1,000 crore–on a US stock exchange, it will probably be [ranked as a] small-cap, or may not even be big enough to get listed"

EYE IN THE SKY: What the drone revolution can do for India. The excitement and the concern

Future Ready

Drone technology is becoming increasingly widespread, and could play a big role in India's next technological revolution. While drones can be a military threat—they have been used for cross-border terrorism—they can also be used to save lives, by transporting vaccines to far-flung areas of the country. At the Conclave, two entrepreneurs talked about the many possible uses for such platforms and the transformational technologies being developed.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- New-age drones are helping the army keep a hawk's eye on areas that would have been environmentally challenging to monitor
- New technologies are emerging quickly, including ways to counter drones
- Swarm drones are on the cutting edge—they mimic the flight of a flock of birds
- Drones will increasingly become part of our lives. They have already been used to deliver vaccines to far-flung areas

SAMEER JOSHI

CEO, NewSpace Research & Technologies

SWARM SATURATION

"A swarm of drones is like a flock of birds flying together. First, they never collide with each other, and second, they don't bang into obstacles. Swarm drones are inspired by biological [phenomena], like how bees or birds operate together. The algorithms that control them generally mimic [these phenomena]. They can be customised specifically for the military domain"

"Drone [manufacturers] are taking stock of the counter measures being put up against them and are improving their systems. For example, the non-kinetic ways [of defending against drones] are to jam their communications or jam their GPS or spoof their GPS. But by next year, there will be drones on the market that can beat these systems... We will have to keep spending money [to develop new technology]"

ANKIT MEHTA

Co-founder and CEO, ideaForge

SURVEILLANCE SYSTEMS

"The Indian army, which has been looking at drone technology for a really long while now, decided it wants to induct systems [that deploy enhanced] numbers—distributed surveillance—to keep an eye on strategically important areas. Therefore, they decided to purchase systems that can help us keep an eye on such areas at that altitude and in those environmental conditions"

"The systems we are delivering to the army are helping it keep an eye on strategically important areas, giving them unprecedented views of what they had never seen before"

"This is the first time India is going to map all the *abadi* areas—where villagers actually stay—using drones, under the 'Svamitva' scheme. It will be able to provide digitised land records, which are irrefutable, to farmers to get them into the economic mainstream of our country"

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जम्मू-कश्मीर के शोपियां में बड़ा आतंकी हमला, 4 पुलिसकर्मी शहीद

पिछले कुछ दिनों में घाटी में आतंकी हमलों में तेजी आई है. एक ओर आतंकी सेना को निशाना बना रहे हैं, तो वहीं सेना भी ऑपरेशन चला

बड़ी खबरें
लाइव टीवी

▶ **BREAKAWAY:** It's time to build cars that are best for the planet

An Electric Moment

Over the past few years, India has seen a buzz of interest about electric vehicles (EVs), thanks to a slew of government policies. Six years ago, the Centre formulated a scheme to speed the adoption and manufacture of hybrid and electric vehicles in India. Phase two of this scheme, which started on April 1, 2019, is being implemented over a period of five years with a budget of Rs 10,000 crore. In June this year, the Department of Heavy Industries tweaked this scheme, increasing purchase incentives for two-wheeler EVs by 50 per cent to Rs 15,000 per kWh (kilowatt hour) of battery capacity. At the India Today Conclave, a panel of experts discussed the impact of these schemes on EV production, the need to improve the ecosystem, and why sustainability needs to go beyond EVs, into better corporate governance and social responsibility. ■

DEEPAK JAIN

Immediate past president, ACMA, and CMD, Lumax Industries

“The auto industry has a huge economic multiplier in the industry. So, we have to be very measured on smart policies. The production-linked incentives scheme is talking about smart investments, technological investments. In India, you need to invest and manufacture locally, else we will lose competitiveness”

DEEPAK BAGLA

MD & CEO, Invest India

“The government has put in place a 360 degree framework [to promote electric vehicles]. In the past four months, the highest number of requests we have got are related to EVs, because of the production-linked incentive schemes. Firms from Taiwan, Korea and Japan are looking at positioning their factories in India”

VIKRAM PAWAH

President & CEO, BMW Group India

“Cars have become extensions of what we do because of the kind of technology that goes into them. BMW wants to be the first German car manufacturer to abide by the Paris Agreement [on climate change]. For that, we need to halve greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 and reach zero emissions by 2050”

PRASHANT BANERJEE

Executive Director, SIAM

“The priorities [for India] should be decarbonisation of transport. However, a sudden migration away from internal combustion engines would impact jobs, and that is not sustainable. We need a smoother and well-planned transition. Buses and three-wheelers are the immediate candidates to transition into EVs”

YOGENDRA PRATAP

Editor, Auto Today

“A transition [from internal combustion engines to electric vehicles] will require time. There is so much infrastructure that needs to be put in place, especially when it comes to batteries, which are the heart of the electric car. The investment required for that is huge”

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▶ **VOLATILE NEIGHBOURS:** Taliban Act 2. How to navigate a dangerous minefield

Winter is Coming

One of the defining geopolitical events of the 21st century unfolded on August 15 this year when the Taliban stormed the capital of Afghanistan and took over Kabul without firing a shot. The Taliban takeover came just two months after US President Joe Biden announced he was pulling US troops out of America's longest war. The ignominious withdrawal and the Taliban takeover has turned the country into a global pariah with no access to badly needed foreign funding. A broke and hungry Afghanistan is on the brink—with winter approaching, there is a very real danger of millions of its citizens starving. Aspiring hegemon China will be closely watching the blow to US prestige. Pakistan's triumph—it has supported the Taliban for nearly three decades—could well be a pyrrhic victory. Three separate conclave sessions decoded the tectonic geopolitical shift symbolised by the fall of Afghanistan. A former CIA director, an Afghan military veteran, Afghanistan's former chief executive and two former diplomats, one Indian, one Pakistani, made sense of what lies ahead beyond this winter of discontent. ■

CHANDRADEEP KUMAR

▶ **LIVE. DIE. REPEAT:** The tragedy of Afghanistan. And what lies ahead

ABDULLAH ABDULLAH

Former Chief Executive, Afghanistan

> “Of course, the Taliban's closest relations are with Pakistan. It has been like this in the past three decades. But more important is the path the Taliban are taking. Will they continue the same way...where they have not been able to address the concerns of the people and people are fleeing the country?”

> **“Fleeing with Ashraf Ghani would have been the last thing I would do in my life. Staying in Kabul was a deliberate decision. It wasn't based on a deal or understanding with the Taliban. And then of course being with the people who have supported us, who respected us as leaders. In the most difficult days of their life perhaps in the past four decades, leaving them alone was something I thought I shouldn't do”**

1. HUSSAIN HAQQANI

Former Ambassador of Pakistan to the United States & Sri Lanka

“The international community will continue to hold Pakistan responsible for events in Afghanistan. And the more Pakistan says, well, we might have supported the Taliban but we do not control them, the less Pakistan’s credibility will be internationally. And lastly, Pakistan will become a victim of terrorism again. The TTP, the Pakistani Taliban, are active”

“America had a one-year plan each year for the last 20 years for Afghanistan. It was just not strategically important enough for the best American strategic minds to devote energies to Afghanistan....basically this was bureaucratic inertia”

2. COL. RAHMAN RAHMANI

Former Afghan pilot

“We have 3,600 women who served in the Afghan military and their lives are in great danger. We have around 300-400 Afghan pilots and flight engineers... journalists and woman activists who remain in the country”

3. GAUTAM MUKHOPADHAYA

Former Indian Ambassador to Syria, Afghanistan and Myanmar

“The days when Pakistan could easily milk the US are over. Across the US establishment, there’s deep suspicion about Pakistan. There was a great deal of dependence on Pakistan for the execution of the war in Afghanistan. That is over”

▶ **CAPTAIN SURGE:** Meet the man who led the US war in Iraq & Afghanistan

GENERAL DAVID PETRAEUS

Former CIA Director

“The Afghan people face, what appears to me, a humanitarian catastrophe...the economy has collapsed, the electricity is not going to keep on flowing if the Taliban don’t pay the central Asian states.... So there is a very, long, very cold, very hard winter, and it could be a very hungry winter that lies ahead”

“Pakistan is going to once again have millions of Afghan refugees on its soil. It’s a country that is very fragile in many respects and it can least afford to have millions of Afghans once again on its soil as it did 20 or so years ago.... So, I think this is going to be very difficult, actually, for Pakistan. Whatever cheers may have gone up in Islamabad over the fact that the Taliban got rid of the Afghan government, I think, will be short-lived”

▶ **END OF HISTORY:** Rethinking super power in the 21st century

THOMAS FRIEDMAN
Three-time Pulitzer winner & author

The Mother of All Super Powers

Covid-19 struck its most devastating blow at the heart of the United States. The US, with over 700,000 deaths and counting (nearly twice India's toll), continues to be the country most affected by the pandemic. The world superpower was suddenly left vulnerable. For Pulitzer-prize winning author and columnist Thomas Friedman, Mother Nature was the victor, the sole superpower. Friedman had famously said 15 years ago that the world was flat because it had created a telecommunications platform where more people in more places could collaborate, compete and connect in more ways than before. The pandemic for him was another defining moment for this flat world. It exposed countries that did not have good healthcare systems and the politics to enable collaboration. But it also showed that the world is getting flatter—more digitised and hence more fused.

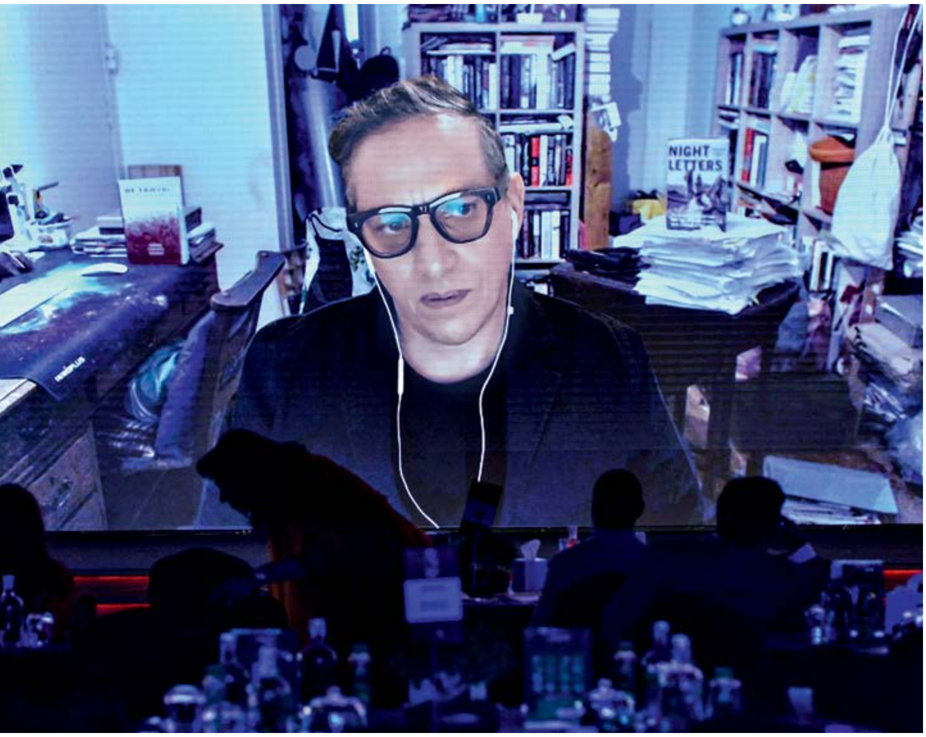
“What the pandemic exposed in America was that a significant portion of the country did not want to respond in a coordinated way...did not want to respond with chemistry, biology and physics, but with ideology and a political election campaign. When you do that with another superpower, maybe you'll get away with it, when you do that with the mother of all superpowers, Mother Nature, she is just chemistry, biology and physics, baby, and she'll make you pay”

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The world is... getting fast. Change races on in an ecosystem of microchips, bandwidth, sensors, software, machine learning
- It's getting fused, by both climate change—we now experience the same weather extremes—and telecommunications
- It's getting really deep. Technology is taking us to places that are so deep even government doesn't know where we are
- It's getting radically open; with this little device, anyone can be a publisher, filmmaker, paparazzi, editor, and it's all open for everyone to comment on
- It's getting really smart; we have built machines now that are beyond anything human brains have evolved

DAY CONCLAVE 2021

RAJWANT RAWAT



RAJWANT RAWAT

▶ **TICKING BOMBS:** Shock & awe stories of terror and espionage in our time

ADRIAN LEVY

Journalist & co-author of Spy Stories

"The ISI has an indomitable position that it's not tethered to civilian procedures and has always wriggled free of any supervision. It also became greatly enriched in the 1980s...it was the period where it became bloodied in battle but also supremely wealthy...and therefore then turning its attention to India"

"RAW is totally different, it was formed 20 years after the ISI and was for many, many years deeply respected and deeply loved for its non-aligned, more peace-maker approach"

"ISI seems notorious, devious, pathological [while] Indians [are portrayed] as cops wedded to democracy. In fact, both have full-spectrum espionage agencies handling everything on spying"

▶ **DRAGON TEETH:** Is the world ready for a Chinese century?

Understanding China's Rise

China's astonishing rise as a military-economic power has been the biggest geopolitical event of the 21st century. China's GDP is five times the size of India's and three times the size of Japan. Its economy is poised to overtake the US's by the end of this decade. China's rise, however, is fraught with consequences for its neighbours like Japan and India, with which it has disputes, and also Taiwan, which it regards as a renegade province and which it has threatened to forcibly capture.

ANDREW SMALL

Author and specialist on Chinese foreign policy

"What they are trying to do now domestically was Xi Jinping's big push—to make the rest of the world dependent on China while [being] self-reliant and to create a level of inter-dependence, an asymmetry, that is in China's favour. And that's a difficult task.... We are already on track and are seeing how China transcends some of the laws of these limitations of dependence...that is conditioning a lot of the near-and long-term approaches China is taking"

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Why China is militarily constrained

- Contained by the first island chain, from Japan all the way through the Ryukyus, Taiwan and Korea—all of whom are US allies
- Is trying to project naval power and learning to be a maritime power but still hasn't made the transition
- Every time China does something, there is a pushback. AUKUS is a reaction to a Chinese build-up over the past 30 years and its attempt to become a maritime and blue water power

CHANDRADEEP KUMAR

SHIVSHANKAR MENON

Former National Security Advisor

"Previous regimes managed the relationship (with China). The trouble is, of course, that the power balance has shifted against us. When we established the 'live and let live' attitude in Rajiv Gandhi's time, our economies were roughly the same size.... Now, China is five times bigger than India economically, technologically, much further ahead and much more integrated into the world. So, the balance has shifted. China's behaviour has shifted because it responds to the relative balance"

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Why China isn't a great power yet

- China is an economic superpower today but still a regional power when it comes to the military. The US is the only power that can project its military power anywhere around the globe when it wants to
- It is situated in a neighbourhood with other rising powers unlike the US or previous hegemons like Britain
- Is dependent on the world for tech, finance, energy, commodities to keep its economy growing

▶ **POST-PANDEMONIUM:** A HEALTH DOCTRINE FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

▶ **VIRUS ORACLE:** CONTAGION, CONTAINMENT AND THE NEXT CRISIS

The Long Haul to Recovery

With Covid cases declining in India, life seems to be returning to normal. But there is a lot left to understand about the virus and Malcolm Grant, founding chair of the National Health Service, England, cautions against complacency. He says, "We are at risk of normalising deaths on a grand scale if we are too complacent about having turned a corner." The only way out, he told the audience at the Conclave, is investing in science. Dr Ian Lipkin, a renowned virologist, believes the focus has to shift from preventing severe disease to preventing any disease. "It is a complicated picture. We have to think about acute disease and the importance of preventing future pandemics," he says. Words worth heeding. ■

SIR MALCOLM GRANT
Founding Chair,
National Health Service,
England; Chancellor,
University of York

"To me, much of the future of healthcare is going to be about data. India has got an opportunity to bring a significant change in what is already being done in the healthcare segment"

"One of the lessons from the pandemic is its impact on people with underlying serious health conditions... such as obesity and Type-2 diabetes. We need to invest more in our healthcare systems to try to improve the overall health of our population"

"In my experience, it's not about hospitals or equipment. It's not even about money. It's about people and the dedication of healthcare professionals that makes the difference between effective and ineffective health systems"

DR IAN LIPKIN, *Virologist*

"I can't say it is over with a great deal of confidence. It depends on how we continue to respond. There has been a problem with leadership globally in addressing the pandemic"

"Vaccination is first and foremost. The types of vaccines we are making now that are given by injection are more difficult to administer than oral or nasal ones. Although our vaccines can prevent serious complications, we should also have a way to prevent the virus from getting into the body in the first place. Through mucosal immunity, you might be able to prevent infection and reduce transmission "

"There is another form of Covid that people don't talk about that is going to be extraordinary in its impact–Long Covid. These are people who could have had a mild disease and yet remain crippled for a long time with cognitive problems, shortness of breath and fatigue"

▶ BULLS IN OUR MEMORY SHOP
DEBATING HERITAGE, HISTORY, HUBRIS

Past Forward

With Hindu-Muslim tensions rising in the past year due to the Ram mandir issue, protests against CAA and the Tablighi Jamaat being blamed for the spread of Covid, historians feel that making peace with the origins of such tensions could help defuse them. However, what is the truth that people should be exposed to and how can history be kept from being used for political mileage? According to historian and author Vikram Sampath, “History is always the handmaiden of the ruler. It is the victor who writes the story.” For Congress MP Shashi Tharoor, on the other hand, people deserve the right to be given all versions of the story and then be allowed to determine for themselves the narrative they wish to believe. “History for today’s political misuse is what I have a problem with,” he says. “Let people have their own understandings but no monopoly of one version of the truth. I have talked about memorialising the atrocities of colonialism not because today you want us to revolt against the British because that’s history, but because we must forgive and not forget.” One thing is certain, though—simply looking ahead is not the answer. The scars of the past, when not selectively picked to suit political ends, could help heal historical differences by being a strong reminder of grief and suffering. ■

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Indian history needs to expand beyond that of Delhi. Awareness of history from all parts of India needs to be included
- History can offer spaces for people to speak uncomfortable truths of the past, learn from the past and prevent future mistakes
- Remembering the past does not necessarily mean celebrating it but, rather, remembering it
- Only one version of the past should not be presented. People have the right to know all aspects of history and then discern for themselves which version to believe
- History should be kept free of political manipulation

SHASHI THAROOR
Congress MP

> “When you ask, rightly, why is today’s Muslim feeling offended when Ghazni or Ghori are denounced, the answer is because it is instrumentalised to demonise them today”

CHANDRADEEP KUMAR

“I am all for reclaiming forgotten voices on all sides. If we allow voices to come forward, what are these voices saying? If the voices are saying Muslims were bad 500 years ago and therefore today’s Muslims should suffer for it, then I have a problem”

“Now, we have a different ethos in power, which argues that India is fundamentally a Hindu country and everybody else here is either a guest or an interloper and that the institutions and laws of the state must reflect an allegiance to a certain cultural civilisational understanding of India which has nothing to do with the idea of India enshrined in the Constitution”

“You cannot and should not deny college students the right to be exposed to a wide variety of views and come to their own conclusions. That is what education is about, to give you the intellectual equipment to discern for yourself”

“We have far too much history to be able to consume it. We use history as a battleaxe to hit each other with. I love reading history, but history should belong to the past and multiple understandings of the past. If you look only at pillage and violence of the past, you have only one kind of truth; if you look only at examples of how Muslims and Hindus have helped one another in the past, then you have a different truth; and if you read both accounts, maybe you’ll arrive at a third truth”

VIKRAM SAMPATH

Historian and author

“Let people read the truth, stare at it in the face and make peace with it. We will keep having fissures in Ayodhya or some other place until these are settled for good”

“India needs to reclaim her history from Delhi and these are constant battles in historiography. There is also a refusal to acknowledge the darker aspects of history, particularly medieval India with the Islamic invasion”

“Our wounds haven’t healed. World over, history offers these spaces where people can speak uncomfortable truths, heal from it, learn from it. We have not made peace with our past and that is why it keeps resurfacing as a cancerous growth”

“Those who don’t remember the past are condemned to repeat it. During Partition, two million people died, 15 million displaced; it is one of the largest displacements in human history. By remembering, you don’t have to celebrate. I don’t know the political motivations, but world over, are Holocaust museums celebrating the Holocaust? Or is it a reminder that history gives that this should never happen again?”

CHANDRADEEP KUMAR

▶ **MAGIC DNA:** INSIDE THE INSPIRATIONAL MINDS OF TWO SPORTING HEROES

Gold Standard

There's little in common between shooter Abhinav Bindra and Neeraj Chopra, a track and field athlete who competes in the javelin throw apart from the fact that they are India's lone Olympic individual gold medalists. Bindra, 39, arrived for the India Today Conclave dressed in formals. Chopra, 23, went for a more casual look. Bindra is shy; Chopra thrives in the spotlight. After his win in Beijing, Bindra felt lost and avoided the media upon his return home. Chopra has had no such issues dealing with fame. He has been modelling, shopping and he even vacationed in the Maldives. There are two qualities though that bind them—their passion for their respective disciplines and their nonchalant ways during crunch time.

Talking about their last rituals before the finals, Bindra recalled how he skipped practice and downed two miniature bottles of Jack Daniel's at night. Chopra, on the other hand, warmed up with three throws hours before the competition and then proceeded to lie down. At the Conclave's inaugural session, the sportsmen spoke candidly about their challenging journeys before reaching the podium and the road ahead for sports in India. ■

ABHINAV BINDRA

Shooter & Olympic Gold Medalist

"Sport taught me honesty; it taught me how to set a goal and deal with conflict and it taught me a lot about respect—respecting others and finding my own self-respect. It has left me in good state to deal with the larger game of life"

BANDEEP SINGH

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- **The evolution of the Indian athlete**: Fearless, driven and possessing self-belief, Indian athletes no longer see themselves as underdogs
- **Rising stature of sport:** More Indians are watching sports and are playing too. Access to government resources has made it easier to be at the elite level
- **Creating a 'psychologically safe' environment for athletes to train:** As more people from the sporting arena talk about their battle with mental health, there need to be professionals who guide them on how to deal with failure and stress
- **Nothing beats hard work:** Bindra had the audience awestruck as he shared his regimen for his quest for gold. It included having his brain mapped; importing litres of yak milk after learning it helps boost concentration; and training in a dark room, among other things. Chopra said he feels guilty even if he misses one rep of his training

NEERAJ CHOPRA

Track & Field athlete and Olympic Gold Medalist

> "Anytime I'm about to compete, I give it my absolute 100 per cent so that later I have no regrets about not doing everything I could have in that moment. I don't focus on the distance as much. I just focus on doing my best"

BINDRA'S ADVICE TO CHOPRA

"Respect your passion and find a good relationship with it. You need to maintain a balance with your sport. You have to respect it by giving it enough. It's almost like a relationship you have with your girlfriend. Not too far but not too close"

▶ **STORIES OF OLYMPIAN SPIRIT:**
THE BRAVEHEARTS OF INDIAN HOCKEY

A Wide Open Field

India's performance at Tokyo 2020 was made more memorable thanks to the incredible efforts of both the men's and women's hockey teams. While the men's team ended India's 41-year Olympic medal drought with a bronze, the women's side came agonisingly close to winning its first medal but lost in a toughly contested tie against Great Britain. Two months later, men's captain Manpreet Singh and goalkeeper Sreejesh Parattu Raveendran and their female counterparts, Rani and Savita Punia, are

SPORTING SPIRIT
(left to right) Rani, Manpreet Singh, Savita Punia and Sreejesh Parattu Raveendran

witnessing first-hand how public perception of the sport has changed. Girls who were reluctant to pick up the stick are now motivated to do so, said Rani, citing the example of her niece who earlier identified hockey as a game most likely to leave you with bruises, but now wants to play. Raveendran mentioned how youngsters in Kerala, a state whose passion for football outscores that for hockey, have begun taking to the sport. “There are kids playing hockey with PVC pipes,” said Raveendran. For the four veterans of the game, Tokyo 2020 marks the beginning of a glorious new chapter in hockey history. In Paris, three years later, they expect to better their feat. ■

CHANDRADEEP KUMAR

RANI

Captain, Indian Women’s Hockey Team

“The 2016 Rio Games were a turning point for women’s hockey. We lost all our matches but we learned how to handle pressure in big events. We began the 2020 Games losing the first three matches but we played good hockey in two of them. The team had faith that we could qualify for the quarter-finals”

“No one says the men’s team has won a medal. They say Indian hockey has won it. The ultimate aim is that the maximum number of kids play hockey regardless of their gender”

SREEJESH PARATTU RAVEENDRAN

Goalkeeper & former captain, Indian Men’s Hockey Team

“We have set an example for the young generation that India can win an Olympic medal. They are inspired to play the game and win a medal for the country”

“Nothing is certain in a sportsman’s life. You may get injured, your form may dip or your competitor may improve his game. But we will try to change the colour of the medal in the next Games. The road ahead won’t be easy. Expectations are higher now”

MANPREET SINGH

Captain, Indian Men’s Hockey Team

“2012 Games was a nightmare. We lost all our games. In 2016, we lost in the quarter-finals. This time, we had a belief we could do it”

SAVITA PUNIA

Goalkeeper, Indian Women’s Hockey Team

“Earlier, we had to wait for government jobs. It was an incentive to do better on field. The situation has changed after the Olympics. Now, younger players are getting job offers. It’s our responsibility to give our best in upcoming tournaments”

OFF THE FIELD

MANPREET CALLED HIS TEAMMATE FROM KERALA, RAVEENDRAN, THE MOST BELOVED MEMBER OF THE SQUAD. “WHEN HE IS ANGRY, HE ABUSES US IN PUNJABI,” SAYS SINGH WITH A LAUGH.

STRONGER, HIGHER, TOGETHER

WHY VICTORY IS A LINE IN THE HEAD. STORIES OF SPORTS AND RESILIENCE

The Para Troopers

India had its best ever showing in the Tokyo 2020 Paralympics with a haul of 19 medals, some coming in disciplines least expected such as table tennis. The standout performance has had an immediate impact, with many states reviving their policies for para sports, as noted by Deepa Malik, Rio Games silver medalist in shot put and president of the Paralympic Committee of India. Malik was joined by national badminton coach Gaurav Khanna and three of Tokyo 2020 medalists who reflected on how they prepared for the games against all odds during the pandemic and how attitudes towards differently-abled individuals are gradually changing. ■

SUHAS YATHIRAJ

District Magistrate, Gautam Buddha Nagar, and Asian Para-Badminton Championship and Paralympics medal-winning badminton player

“In India, elite athletes definitely have all they want. The real challenge is with respect to the district- and state-level federations of individual athletic sports. They need to manage the funds, run effectively and identify talent at grassroot level when they are young and budding. That is the task cut out for all of us”

BHAVINA PATEL

Olympic Silver Medal-winning para-table tennis player

“There is so much change and awareness...Para athletes are more confident which is why they are able to focus on their game. I hope it will be much better in the future. And of course, there will be more athletes and more medals”

(left to right) Suhas Yathiraj; Gaurav Khanna; Pramod Bhagat; Bhavina Patel and Deepa Malik

RAJWANT RAWAT

PRAMOD BHAGAT

Olympic Gold medal winning para-badminton player

“When you play for yourself, you may get nervous. There are so many thoughts in the background. But when I went [to Tokyo], I was going for the whole para-badminton community. It was the first time badminton was included in the Paralympics. I thought, if I win then para-badminton will be on top”

DEEPA MALIK

Rio Gold Medalist and President, Paralympic Committee of India

“As president, my one endeavour was to see maximum participation of women. We had a tough two years due to the pandemic. What helped my quest to get more women to compete in Tokyo was the bipartite entries. We had a girl in canoeing, in taekwondo and powerlifting”

▶ **KING KONG:** **The multi-billion-dollar world of gaming. And why India is still playing catch-up**

Massively Multiplayer

With most kids and youngsters holed up in their homes during the Covid-19 pandemic, the Indian online gaming industry saw a huge surge. Hopes are high among the industry stakeholders that the sector gains more traction as e-sports makes its debut as a competitive event at next year's Asian Games. Five of them—from one of India's leading e-sports athletes to a business head—came together at the Conclave to share their insights on current trends, what lies ahead and why e-gaming is here to stay.

(Left to right) Naman Mathur aka Mortal; Vishwalok Nath; Anish Kapoor; Prasad Mangipudi; and Aneesh Aravind

RAJWANT RAWAT

KEY TAKEAWAYS

THE MOBILE GAMING REVOLUTION
"Right now, close to 45 per cent of the gamers play on mobile phones," said Anish Kapoor, CEO, Infinix Mobiles India. "It has become the new norm over a period of time...I think there's still a great opportunity with 5G technology coming into play." Kapoor foresees a whole new range of phones tailormade for a wholesome gaming experience.

THE ASIAN GAMES BOOST The inclusion of e-sports to the competition in Hangzhou brings "a lot of legitimacy" to the sport, said Aneesh Arvind, country manager of Krafton. It's a win-win situation for both the video games industry as well as the organisers who can lure young audiences to follow the Games next year.

A FAST-GROWING INDUSTRY PRODUCES FAST CHAMPIONS
Prasad Mangipudi, managing director, Sportzlive and co-owner of e-sports team Hyderabad Hydras, was confident that the day isn't far that India will see a "global champion". "Its ecosystem is highly democratised," he said while citing the example of Mortal aka Naman Mathur, a e-sport athlete who became an icon within three years.

E-SPORTS IS NOT A LEISURELY PURSUIT, IT'S A JOB According to Mortal, an e-sport athlete has to invest six hours a day minimum into his passion. "Just like any other office job, an athlete has to sit and play with his team. There has to be a discipline in their life," said Mathur. "The entire team has to wake up at the same time, sleep at the same time, have team discussions." In a full-fledged industry, there are multiple vacancies, be it for a coach, a player manager, a graphic designer, an analyst or more.

BIGGER THAN CRICKET Vishwalok Nath, business head, gaming and e-sports, at the India Today Group, drew comparisons between the two sports and highlighted how the Fortnight World Cup has twice as much prize money as the ICC World Cup. Even in viewership, e-sports is ahead of cricket.

▶ **PLANET DOCTORS:** Meet the dynamic young women fighting to keep India green

Defenders of the Earth

Climate change is a growing global problem. But despite increasing awareness, the steps taken to counter it on individual and national scales are still limited. "With the reforms proposed in the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980, the government is diluting India's environment laws. A lot of projects won't need the approvals they needed earlier," says Disha Ravi. How can climate activists find ways to connect with citizens and governments to prompt action and change? From narrating the disastrous impact of climate change via films to fighting for policy changes, young activists are going against all odds to make environment conservation a priority on everyone's list.

BANDEEP SINGH

MALAIKA VAZ
Climate Activist

"We need to realise how important combating the climate crisis is. The solutions and science are already there. Right now, it's just about making this a priority"

"I get a lot of flak for sometimes getting unnecessarily close to the animals I film. Sometimes, I hike up a mountain or go diving and people ask why I do these 'dangerous' things. But the thing is, if we tell boring stories about the natural world, we will lose people. We need people to take notice because we only have a few decades to make a change"

DISHA RAVI
Climate Activist

"People often say that the open forest cover is increasing. However, if you look at that data closely, you'll see that the definition of 'open forest cover' is so vague that it can even include 30-40 trees planted close together in a park. This vagueness in definition is true of many environment norms and allows data to be manipulated"

"Environment activism is about humans because we are all part of it. It's the Earth defending itself"

GUNJAN MENON
Climate Activist

"Expansion of palm oil projects in India is disastrous because it can lead to deforestation, disturbances in the ecosystem, and trigger land conflict. The Northeast, where some of these plantations will come up, is not even viable for it, as per experts"

▶ **FIRE STARTERS:** The extraordinary men who brought revolutionary light to India

Bringing Heroes to Life

Filmmaker Shoojit Sircar and National Award-winning actor Vicky Kaushal spoke at length on their upcoming film, *Sardar Udham*, a biopic on the revolutionary who shot dead Michael O'Dwyer, the lieutenant governor of Punjab at the time of the Jallianwala Bagh massacre.

BANDEEP SINGH

VICKY KAUSHAL

Actor

ON HIS IDEA OF INDIA

"My day started with reading the pledge every morning in school. It was about celebrating diversity and secularism, the brotherhood we have. One of the things that I am proud of is that being an Indian changes every 100 kilometres. The culture changes, the language changes, the food changes, the way we dress changes. We are living in a land full of white people, black people, brown people, every shade of people and we live together in this piece of land called India. We represent not just one culture but a whole range of cultures, and that, for me, is India"

SHOOJIT SIRCAR

Filmmaker

ON HIS TREATMENT OF *SARDAR UDHAM*

"We see a revolutionary as a heroic personality...but I see heroism a bit differently. For me, it is doing the right thing, at the right time, rather than not doing it. They were called underground rebels but were actually constructing a separate movement for youth at the time. Their idea was not just limited to India or Hindustan. They wanted to liberate the entire world. That fascinated me"

ON THE CRAFT OF IMMERSIVE CINEMA

"I try to create the world in my films. I feel if I create the world right, 50 per cent of my job, to get into the audience's mind and capture their attention, is done"

▶ **SERIAL THRILLERS:** The stars who have hijacked our minds

Streaming Superstars

There was no box office magic for Salman Khan or Akshay Kumar in 2020-21. Instead, the stars were all shining on streaming platforms. At the Conclave, three of OTT's most popular actors–Pankaj Tripathi, Richa Chadha and Sanya Malhotra–were joined by Aparna Purohit, head of India originals at Amazon Prime Video, to share insights about the fast-growing industry and how their popularity has soared.

RICHA CHADHA

Actor

ON WHY SHE DID A WEB SERIES AS EARLY AS 2017

"When I said yes to *Inside Edge*, it was because I couldn't relate to television and the *saas-bahu* shows on it. There was good TV that my parents grew up watching, but there was nothing for me. I could not see anybody in my generation, in my group, watching those [shows] either. I understood that there was a need for intelligent Indian content in Indian languages. I mean, for how long will we watch *Narcos* and shows that come from the West?"

ON HOW INDIA'S SOCIO-POLITICAL REALITY SEEPS INTO WEB SERIES

"Art imitates life. A lot of shows reflect what is going on. It is the curse of the artist to feel more viscerally than perhaps a banker or an accountant. So when a writer or a DoP [director of photography] or a producer or an actor looks at what's going on around us, they're bound to be impacted by it. You can deal with it allegorically, or through humour, or in the non-fiction format, or in a subversive way. But it will find its way into the [shows] that we're [making]"

APARNA PUROHIT
INDIA TODAY CONCLAVE 2021

CHANDRADEEP KUMAR

APARNA PUROHIT

Head of India Originals, Amazon Prime Video

ON CREATING A SUCCESSFUL SHOW

“[The points I consider include] what is so compelling about this story? What is so different about it, why must the story be told and why must it be told now? Secondly, how invested is the creator? At Amazon, every decision is customer-backward: What are the stories that are waiting to be told that customers really want to watch?”

PANKAJ TRIPATHI

Actor

ON THE POWER OF OTT

“Many actors [besides me] have finally got their space because of OTT. We have eight hours here to tell our stories—we don’t have to finish them in just two hours. So, even while writing a script, people get the time to get inside the layers of a character, which is not possible in films”

SANYA MALHOTRA

Actor

ON HOW STREAMING PLATFORMS ARE BIG ENABLERS

“I think OTT has given creators and artists a very big platform to experiment with the content that they’re writing and performing”

OVERHEARD IN THE SPEAKER’S LOUNGE

Richa Chadha was seen teasing Aparna Purohit to release season three of what was Prime Video’s first Indian series, *Inside Edge*. Chadha plays Zarina Malik, owner of a cricket team. “Bring it out in December,” said the actress.

The Power Players

THE 2021 EDITION OF THE INDIA TODAY CONCLAVE SAW PERSONALITIES FROM ALL WALKS OF LIFE—POLITICS, SPORTS, ENTERTAINMENT, ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVISM—COME TOGETHER TO REFLECT ON WHAT THE FUTURE, THE POST-PANDEMIC WORLD HOLDS

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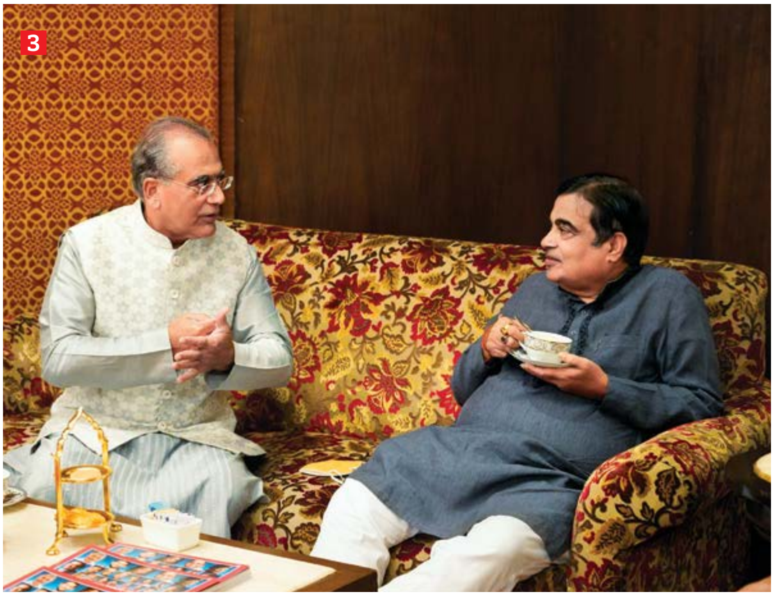

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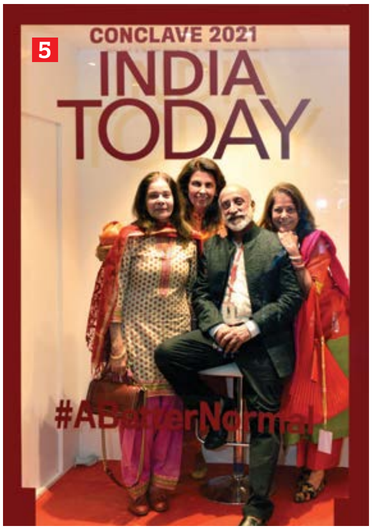
1. J.P. Nadda, Amit Malviya, Sanjay Mayukh, Gaurav Bhatia, Jitendra Singh, Rajeev Chandrasekhar, Gopal Krishna Agarwal, Anil Baluni, Locket Chatterjee, K.K. Sharma, Rajeev Jaitley **2.** Rajendra Agrawal, Kiren Rijiju and Anurag Thakur with hockey players Sreejesh Parattu Raveendran, Manpreet Singh, Rani Rampal and Savita Punia **3.** Aroon Purie and Nitin Gadkari **4.** Suhas Yathiraj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5. Rekha Purie, Reva Puri, Neera Malhotra and Aman Nath; **6.** General M.M. Naravane and Himanta Biswa Sarma **7.** Savita Punia, Sreejesh Parattu Raveendran, Rani Rampal and Manpreet Singh **8.** Abhinav Bindra, Kalli Purie and Neeraj Chopra

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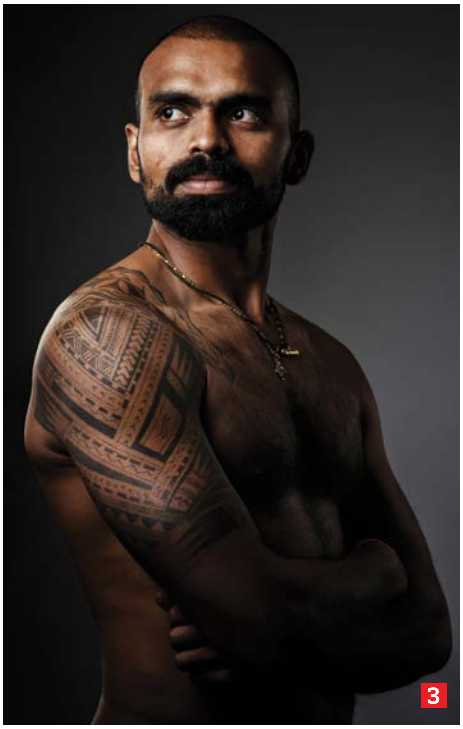
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1. Shashi Tharoor with his sisters Shobha Tharoor Srinivasan and Smita Tharoor **2.** Gen. M.M. Naravane, Himanta Biswa Sarma, Aroon Purie and Arif Mohammad Khan **3.** Sreejesh Parattu Raveendran **4.** Deepa Malik, Bhavina Patel, Pramod Bhagat and Gaurav Khanna

5. Rajeev Sethi and Rajendra Singh

6. Rekha Purie, Gunjan Menon, Malaika Vaz and Disha Ravi

7. J.P. Nadda and Kalli Purie

8. Smriti Zubin Irani

9. Gaurav Bhatia and Jitendra Singh
10. Manisha Malhotra and Rakesh Tikait
11. S. Jaishankar and Rakesh Jhunjhunwala
12. Richa Chadha and Aparna Purohit

13. Anurag Thakur
14. Genelia Deshmukh & Riteish Deshmukh

Photographs by BANDEEP SINGH, YASIR IQBAL, RAJWANT RAWAT, CHANDRADEEP KUMAR AND HARDIK CHHABRA

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HOMECOMING Raj Kumar's team has been able to send 70 missing children back to their homes in 2021

RANJAN RAHI

Messiah of *Missing Children*

***Happiness delivery:** Reuniting lost children with their parents; rescuing abandoned and abused children*

RAJ KUMAR, 43

Directorate of Social Welfare-cum-Empowerment of Persons with Disability

Patna, Bihar

By **AMITABH SRIVASTAVA**

It was two years ago that Bihar social department head Raj Kumar first heard about 10-year-old Prakash (name changed). The boy, who spoke only Bangla and suffered from epilepsy, was found stranded at Muzaffarpur railway station by the police in 2015. He had apparently got lost while taking a train all by himself from his home in West Bengal's Purba Bardhaman to his grandparents' place in Malda. Social welfare officials shifted Prakash to a state-run children's home in Saharsa. His daily needs were taken care of there but his future remained uncertain.

Moved by the boy's plight, Kumar stepped in. His first priority was to address his medical condition. Prakash underwent treatment at government and private hospitals in Muzaffarpur and Patna. Within a year, his seizures came under control. But Kumar, a 2010 batch IAS officer, had a bigger goal. He wanted to see Prakash reunited with his family. His team tried to trace back Prakash's ill-fated train journey, visited towns and cities in West Bengal and sought the help of officials in Bengal and Jharkhand, but without any headway.

Kumar, then, hit upon the idea of approaching the UIDAI (Unique Identification Authority of India) to see if Prakash's biometric details would find a match in their database. "Our search threw up a match in Purba Bardhaman district. The team that was sent there made a heartwarming breakthrough. The boy, who had been missing for five years, returned to his family this February," says Kumar. He has had many such successes. On September 15, Kumar's team handed over a 14-year-old deaf and mute girl to her family in Araria district. The girl was found lost at

What makes me *happy*

REKHA BHARDWAJ

Singer

"The pandemic has been bad for all, but it has also been transforming as we have all learnt to live differently. I have learnt one really interesting life mantra from Gulzar *sahab*–that life will always give us new problems, but it is up to us to decide whether we want to wake up and spend our day cribbing about it or accept it and stay happy. So, despite all odds, I choose to celebrate my life each day, stay positive and do things that make me happy–*riyaaz*, meditation, some *zikr* and, most importantly, thank god for all that he has given us. Gratitude and following your heart are always my happiness mantras."

TIPS FOR HAPPINESS

Shalini Arvind, chief dietician, Fortis Hospital, Bannerghatta, Bengaluru, on 5 foods that can make you happy

1. **Complex carbohydrates:** There are a lot of myths around carbs and often people go on low-carb or carb-free diets without realising how it may impact their moods and emotions. When we eat carbs, it leads to the secretion of insulin in our bodies. Along with insulin, serotonin, a happy hormone and neurotransmitter, is also released. This helps make us happy and reduce stress. It is important to eat complex carbs such as millets, wheat, brown rice and not just processed simply like juice or candy or pastries. Processed carbs lead to a spike and fall in sugar levels which then makes you constantly crave sugar or carbs, leading eventually to weight gain and health complications.

2. **Vitamin B6 rich food:** Vitamin B6 is also connected with the regulation of serotonin. Foods high in this are green leafy vegetables, nuts, seeds and white meat.

2. **Nuts:** A small amount of nuts is good. We recommend the serving size depending on a person's weight and health. Nuts are fatty and so should not be consumed in large quantities. However, they do contain essential vitamins, including magnesium, the deficiency of which makes the body susceptible to stress, which then increases magnesium deficiency.

4. **Fatty fish:** Salmon, mackerel have omega 3 fatty acids that help nourish the brain and improve the secretion and regulation of various mood-enhancing hormones.

5. **Probiotics:** Naturally fermented food, like yoghurt, helps improve our gut health. Our gut is our second brain and if you do not look after it, it will impact your mood and happiness. One shouldn't consider the body as a dumping ground but give the gut a break once in a while by eating easily digestible food and probiotics.

the Araria bus stand on March 3. Social welfare officials sent her to the shelter home in Kishanganj and worked for months to find her parents.

Using the biometric method, the social welfare department has been able to send 70 missing children back to their homes this year. Of them, 17 were girls; four, with special needs, were from Bengal and Jharkhand. "Reuniting children with their parents gives me utmost satisfaction," beams Kumar.

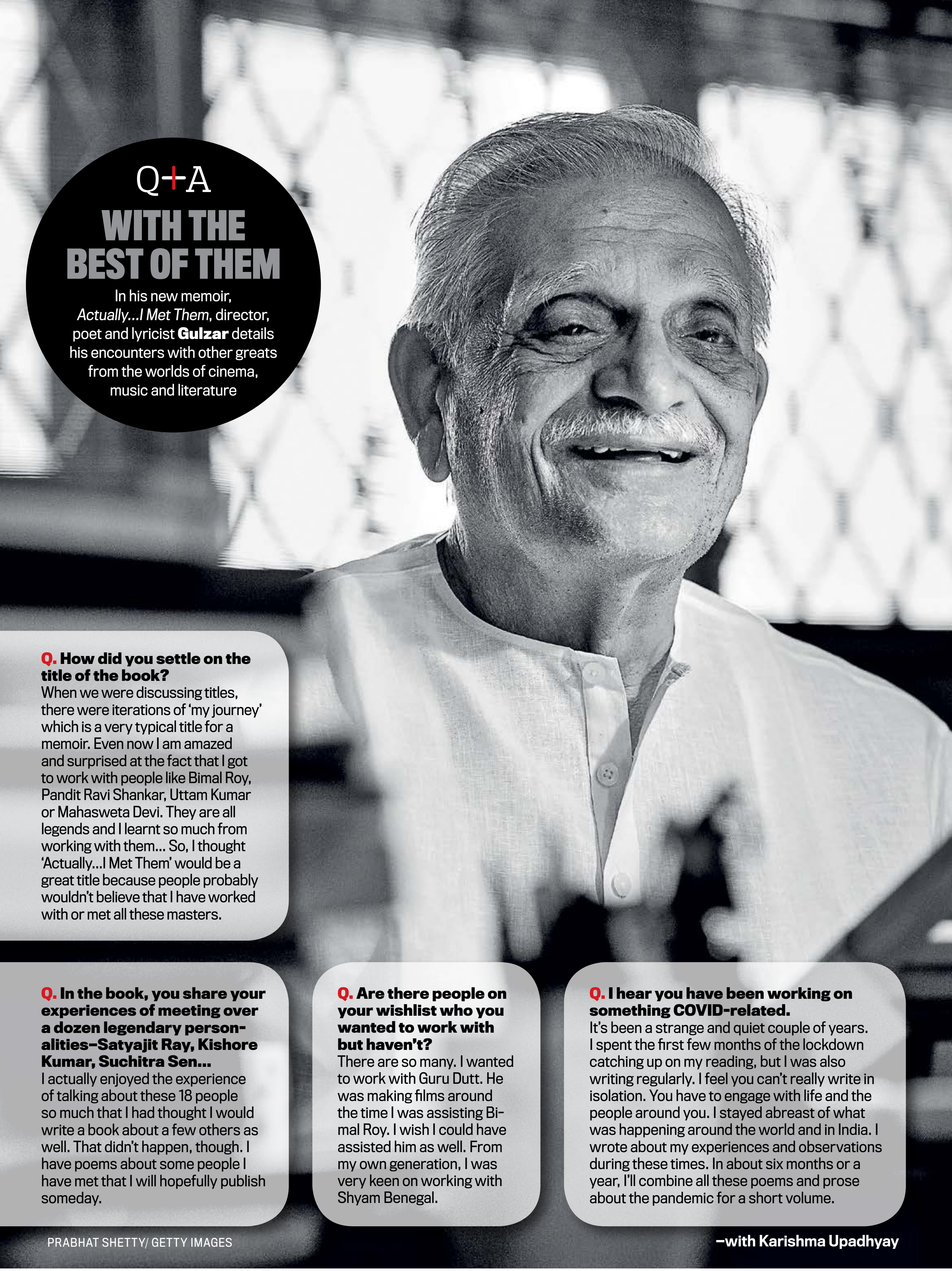
Kumar's initiatives go beyond helping lost children. He has arranged professional training in Bengaluru for 14 sexually abused girls, including several rescued from the infamous Muzaffarpur shelter home in 2018. He also convinced the Bihar government to allocate more funds towards food supplies at the child shelters and got cradles placed in government hospitals to dissuade couples from recklessly abandoning their babies in, say, dumpsters or on train tracks.

As a bureaucrat, 43-year-old Kumar does not have roads, buildings and big projects to showcase. He feels immensely content trying to give disadvantaged children a second chance. "I feel blessed because my job has given me the opportunity to make a difference where it matters the most," he says. ■

HAPPINESS MANTRA

> ***"A mother's bright smile on finding her missing child, the lit up face of the child–these give me immeasurable satisfaction and bliss. To top it all, the pleasure of having made a difference"***
>
> *– **RAJ KUMAR,** Director, Directorate of Social Welfare-cum- Empowerment of Persons with Disability, Bihar*

Happiness Quest: *A joint enterprise of India Today and the RPG Group celebrating exemplary initiatives to spread happiness*



Q+A

WITH THE BEST OF THEM

In his new memoir, *Actually...I Met Them*, director, poet and lyricist **Gulzar** details his encounters with other greats from the worlds of cinema, music and literature

Q. How did you settle on the title of the book?
When we were discussing titles, there were iterations of 'my journey' which is a very typical title for a memoir. Even now I am amazed and surprised at the fact that I got to work with people like Bimal Roy, Pandit Ravi Shankar, Uttam Kumar or Mahasweta Devi. They are all legends and I learnt so much from working with them... So, I thought 'Actually...I Met Them' would be a great title because people probably wouldn't believe that I have worked with or met all these masters.

Q. In the book, you share your experiences of meeting over a dozen legendary personalities—Satyajit Ray, Kishore Kumar, Suchitra Sen...
I actually enjoyed the experience of talking about these 18 people so much that I had thought I would write a book about a few others as well. That didn't happen, though. I have poems about some people I have met that I will hopefully publish someday.

Q. Are there people on your wishlist who you wanted to work with but haven't?
There are so many. I wanted to work with Guru Dutt. He was making films around the time I was assisting Bimal Roy. I wish I could have assisted him as well. From my own generation, I was very keen on working with Shyam Benegal.

Q. I hear you have been working on something COVID-related.
It's been a strange and quiet couple of years. I spent the first few months of the lockdown catching up on my reading, but I was also writing regularly. I feel you can't really write in isolation. You have to engage with life and the people around you. I stayed abreast of what was happening around the world and in India. I wrote about my experiences and observations during these times. In about six months or a year, I'll combine all these poems and prose about the pandemic for a short volume.

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